

MY DEAR CHURCHILL,
AND OTHER
OPEN LETTERS

MY DEAR CHURCHILL,
AND OTHER
OPEN LETTERS
TO PERSONS IN AUTHORITY
by
POPULUS

LONDON
VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD
1941

CONTENTS

<i>Chapter</i> I. To the Right Hon. Winston Churchill, Prime Minister and Leader of the Conservative Party	<i>Page</i> 7
II. To the Right Hon. Clement Attlee, Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party	17
III. To the Right Hon. Ernest Bevin, Member of the War Cabinet, in his capacity as Chairman of the Production Executive	29
IV. To the Right Hon. Sir Andrew Duncan, Minister of Supply	40
V. To the Right Hon. Ernest Bevin, Member of the War Cabinet, in his capacity as Minister of Labour and National Service	54
VI. To the Right Hon. Capt. David Margesson, Secretary of State for War	66
VII. To the Right Hon. Anthony Eden, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs	75

<i>Chapter VIII.</i>	To the Right Hon. L. S. Amery, Secretary of State for India	<i>Page</i> 83
IX.	To the Right Hon. Herbert Morrison, Secretary of State for Home Affairs, and Minister of Home Security	91
X.	To the Right Hon. Sir Kingsley Wood, Chancellor of the Exchequer	98
XI.	To the Right Hon. Sir Archibald Sinclair, Secretary of State for Air, and Leader of the Liberal Party	106
XII.	To the Right Hon. Hugh Dalton, Minister of Economic Warfare	113

I

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE WINSTON CHURCHILL

PRIME MINISTER AND LEADER OF THE
CONSERVATIVE PARTY

WAR LORD,

(for that is what you are, a warrior born and never a man of peace) I appeal to you, as the first citizen of my country, in its hour of greatest trial. You became Prime Minister, after Chamberlain's ignoble failure, because in the straits to which Great Britain had been reduced last spring, even before the final fall of France, there was literally no-one else capable of leading the country. In certain respects—and those among the most important in the immediate emergency—your qualifications for leadership are high. You have courage, resolution, endurance; and you have also the power to inspire these qualities in others. You are a he-man, and not a bleater; and you positively enjoy standing fast, with your back to the wall.

In the situation which existed last spring and summer, these were the qualities that mattered most. The collapse of France exposed Great Britain to the imminent danger of an invasion that would have caught this country almost wholly defenceless and unprepared. We had men; but the loss of equipment in France had been on a disastrous scale. Surrender—or a peace which everyone knew would mean sur-

render, however camouflaged—was being whispered about in the highest quarters. The country needed a leader possessed both of abounding energy and of a relish in facing odds; and there was no-one but you. A Labour man, even if one of the right calibre had been available, could hardly have filled the bill, because the mere suggestion of fighting the war under Socialist leadership would have sent a large proportion of the propertied classes scurrying for peace at any price. A Conservative Parliament required a Conservative leader; but he had also to be a leader whom the Labour Opposition would support. For, unless the workers in the aircraft and other munition factories had turned to with a will, no courage or resolution on the part of leaders could have saved us. It was touch and go; and it was your mission to hold the middle and upper classes steady while, in the factories, the workers hammered away day and night. In those days of peril, you made yourself into a national leader; and the working classes, as well as others, accepted your leadership, despite their acute disagreement with you on most matters except the one immediately in hand—stopping the Nazis, at any cost.

During the following months it was noticeable, in the House of Commons, how the Labour men cheered your war speeches, whereas there was often a sullen silence on the Conservative benches. The men of property were mourning for Chamberlain, their unquestioning defender. The Tory machine and its representatives in Parliament did not love the nation's war lord, or the hybrid Government he had brought with him. They didn't want to beat Hitler, if beating Hitler might mean getting Socialism as the reward of

victory. For England they might have been willing to give their lives, but they were not willing to be stripped of their possessions.

Presently, however, these same Tories inducted you as Chamberlain's successor into the leadership of the Conservative Party. They did so, not because they had learned to love you any better, but because they felt you would be safer in the grip of the party machine than free of it. If they made you leader, they would have some control over you. If they left you out in the cold, you might, by your personal prestige, steal away their popular support, and leave them impotent to defend their property—impotent to insist on the war being so conducted, and the peace so made, as to leave their privileges intact.

While these intrigues were going on, what thoughts were in your mind? Principally, I feel sure, the thought of going through to victory, against all odds; for that is the mould in which you are cast. But with that indomitableness of yours goes a weakness. For you, war is primarily a question of strategy—of military measures, by land and air and sea. Only to a quite minor extent is war, for you, a question of economics. You expect the planes, the tanks, the guns, and all the rest of the necessary equipment for your fighters to be ready for you when you want them; and you are too much inclined to leave to others the job of seeing that they are made ready. You do not trouble your head very much about the economic side of the war, beyond telling those you have put in charge of it to go away and get things done. But, in modern warfare, the economic side—equipment, feeding and clothing for the troops, and the maintenance of supplies for the civil population—are matters so

vitally important that, if anything goes wrong with them, no military effort can avail. A modern war lord cannot afford to be uninterested in these things: he needs to keep his eye on them fully as much as on the theatres of actual warfare, and to be at no less pains to ensure their proper organisation than to secure the right disposition of his forces in the field.

I strongly suspect that this is where you are slipping up. The men who are supposed to be organising and co-ordinating the economic side of the war are not, in fact, getting the best out of the nation's productive resources. Nor are they, I think, reporting to you in such a way as to compel you to realise where things are going wrong. Consequently you have no vision of what is necessary for the economic side of the war effort; and when you are required, in the War Cabinet, to consider economic questions, you are apt to be impatient, and to deal with them off-handedly, as if it had been an impertinence to trouble you with them at all. In economic affairs, the War Cabinet does not function effectively as a deciding body: it leaves the various departments to fight such questions out among themselves.

It is doubtless comfortable for you thus to cold-shoulder the economic side of the war; for if you were forced to attend to it, you would find your dual position as Prime Minister and as Conservative leader much more difficult than you do. You are not, after all, at heart a Conservative, in the sense in which Conservatism is understood by the managers of the party and among the majority of Conservative M.P.s. You are not a man for whom the claims of property count above everything else. You are an Imperialist, a believer in power-politics, a political

romantic, and a lover of the war-game—not a hard-headed business man. For the glory of the British Empire you would cheerfully hang all the great imperial contractors and financiers, and lay waste all their property, if you thought it needful. They are aware of this, and distrust you in proportion. But, for the present, they are compelled to follow you, because you have, for the present, more power to defend their property than anyone else.

This non-economic, romantic Imperialism of yours is, as a creed, infinitely more respectable than their money-grubbing. But in some respects, though not in all, it is also more dangerous. It causes you to regard the problem of India primarily, not after their fashion as a matter of the best means of continuing to exact tribute for British investors from the Indian people, but as a question of British imperial prestige. This makes you, or at least has so far made you, more unyielding than the financial imperialists for whom the whole question is finally one of pounds, shillings and pence. On the other hand, this same romanticism causes you to be more liberal than the money-grubbers in colonial policy—up to the point at which anyone suggests that the very possession of a colonial empire is at variance with the principles of democracy. Then you see red, and there is nothing to be done with you.

Some day, my war lord, this war is going to end; and you, if you are still Prime Minister, will find yourself called upon to cultivate the arts of peace. What will you do then, or rather, what are you meditating now, in readiness for that coming time? To what sort of peace, at home and abroad, between the nations and between the classes, are you looking

forward? Probably you are not giving much thought to such matters, having your hands full with what seem to you more immediate military tasks. But you cannot continue to lead the country, even to the end of the war, and not have some notion whither you are trying to guide the people.

First, then, is your aim to put back the old Europe, or to clear space for the new? In my opinion, your one chance of beating Hitler and wiping Hitlerism out of Europe is to help the peoples of Europe to put something solid in Hitler's place; and I am damned sure that new, solid thing is not represented by the exiled European Governments which have found harbourage in Great Britain. The thing that will drive Hitler out of Europe can come only from the heart of the peoples—from European revolution, aided by your military effort, but not manufactured in London to suit the Englishman's taste—much less, to suit the taste of the Conservative Party. Are you ready to help the cause of revolution in Europe—even against the will of the party that has reluctantly made you its leader?

Secondly, on what foundations do you expect the structure of the new Europe to rest? Surely not no foundations laid to the specifications of Brummagen business men, or on any capitalist foundations whatsoever? You have no veneration for the money-grubbers, to make you think them capable of building a new world. You have it in you to use such men as your instruments, as Hitler did, contemptuously letting them keep their property and preserve their right to exploit the poor, in return for doing your bidding and serving your ends. But, if that were what you were after, you would not be fighting Hitler, but

dividing the world up with him, even if you came to fighting him later on. Moreover, if that were in your mind, what could we make of all your fine (if rather vague) utterances in praise of freedom and democracy? I, at any rate, give you credit for meaning something by these fine words, though not by a long way what I mean by them, or think they must mean, if they are to be worth fighting for in the twentieth century. I believe you do, for all your love of war and empire, honestly dislike the Totalitarian State.

Very well then. If you reject Totalitarianism, what are you out for instead? Not the old capitalist system; for that you can't have. It has dug its own grave much too deep to be brought back to life. You will have to stand for some sort of Socialism, as the only practical alternative to either Fascism or Totalitarian Communism, for the world of to-morrow. Why not stand for it now, when you can use it to help you in your immediate task of winning the war?

True, if you did this, the Conservative head office would be mad with you, and the business men on the Tory back benches would regard you as a traitor to your party and your class. But what would that matter? You and the Labour men together could sweep the country; and the Labour men would be twice the men they are now in fighting quality if they knew that you were on their side. On that footing you could become, not merely the nation's war lord, but its peace lord as well. You could sweep all Europe up to the frontiers of the Soviet Union with the impulse of your new ideas, and could thus clear the road for your armies to complete the triumph of the European Revolution.

But—in order to take up that role of democratic

leadership, you would have to shake off a great deal of your own past. You would have to deal with the peoples of India as equals, and not as rebellious slaves. You would have to stop thinking about the glories of the British Empire, and begin thinking about Europe and the world. And you are capable of doing this—being, not an ignoble money-grubber, but an idealist, with a power of making a new ideal your own. I have not forgotten that you, in the hour of France's fall, did make—too late, and with too little consideration of the best way of making it—that gesture of proposing that the peoples of France and Britain should merge their statehoods in a common citizenship. Nothing came of it, then. Nothing could come of it, as things were. But the very proposal marked you out as a man not hidebound by old notions, and as understanding—even if only in a flash—that this war has already destroyed so much as to force inescapably upon this generation the task of making the world anew—the task which, to our shame and ruin, we shirked and bungled twenty-two years ago.

These are not thoughts to be set aside now, and taken up only when the war is over. They are the very stuff of which victory—military victory—has to be made. To shun them now is to fight blindly, without plan or purpose to set against Hitler's project of universal enslavement. War is waged between minds, as well as between armies. Victory depends, not only on superiority of armed force and economic equipment, but also on a correct appreciation of the currents of history. It is equally futile to fight for obsolete ideals, or for no ideals at all. The leader must have ideals, or he cannot lead the people: in order to lead

them to victory, he must have ideals which square with realities, and are in conformity with historic trends.

The realities you have to reckon with are machines—machines that annihilate distance, aggregate power into ever larger masses, make giant power manipulable by fewer and fewer men. Nation States, as well as the old types of competitive business, go down like ninepins before this giant power. Old notions of revolution go down before it, as well as simple notions of continuing to do as our fathers did. Nothing can stay its advance: the only open question is, who is to be master of this giant power, and to what purpose? You have fully enough of the warrior in you to feel exultation in its destructive might. Have you also enough of the statesman-idealist to exult in the thought of harnessing it to the cause of human happiness? We need a leader who can do that, and put into us the hope and the belief that victory over Nazism will not mean pushing us back into the old ruts. We cannot give of our best if we expect, as the reward of victory, merely to exchange one insecurity for another—the more galling because there seems no reason why it should ever end. We do not want to be pushed back into unemployment, unwantedness, the sense of futility out of which Nazism itself was bred. We want a leader who will give us hope—and not merely the hope of victory, but a hope beyond.

In war, we, the people, need a leader who will not be our war lord only, but our prophet as well. From you, as long as you stay hobnobbing with your Margessons and Swintons, we cannot look for such leadership. But, if you could break with these men, whose support only blinkered concentration on military

matters makes you feel you need—if you made up your mind thoroughly, regardless of every vested interest, every limpet and routinier, and every dead preconception of your own, to organise the people for war and for peace—you, with Labour to help you, with the leaders of Labour shaken out of their hesitations by your urgency for action, with honest men from every group and class and party rallying to your support—you could lead us, not into Utopia, but at least some distance along the road we need to travel.

Yours sincerely,
POPULUS.

II

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE CLEMENT ATTLEE

LORD PRIVY SEAL AND LEADER OF THE
PARLIAMENTARY LABOUR PARTY

MY DEAR ATTLEE,

You are, in these days, a very important and, I doubt not, an exceedingly busy man. You head the representatives of Labour in the War Cabinet; and among the members of the Cabinet you have the largest general responsibility for the conduct of home affairs. The Prime Minister, we are given to understand, concentrates his attention mainly on the military aspects of the war, and leaves to you the general oversight of its other aspects. He is even said to have declared, at the time when he was forming his Government, that henceforward the economic side of the war would be mainly the business of his Labour colleagues.

Even if that story is to be taken with a grain of salt, or if the Tory head office has since imposed on him the need for modifying his attitude (or what is Sir John Anderson doing in the War Cabinet?) you have a great responsibility for the economic conduct of the war. I want to put you a straight-forward question. Are you satisfied with the way things are going, on the economic front? If you are, there is no more to be said. But I can hardly think that you, an

old Socialist and one who has been accustomed to take his Socialism seriously, can be well pleased with the curious mix-up of economic agencies and controls, improvised without any ground plan and frequently in conflict one with another, by means of which we are supposed to be mobilising the nation's resources for total war.

If you are not satisfied, but have had from time to time serious doubts in your mind, I entreat you to spare a little hour from your day-to-day preoccupations, in order to stand back and look at the entire panorama of the national war effort on the home front.

You will get, if you do, a vision of a great many people working very hard, often under very difficult conditions, to make up for lost time in the production of munitions and other supplies; of sailors facing great risks at sea, and civilians great risks at home, cheerfully and with high courage; of an abundance of grit and goodwill to put up with whatever is necessary in order to stop Hitler. You will be able to congratulate yourself that the war effort is a great deal more intense than it was when you and your colleagues took office last May, and that its tasks are being tackled with a very much better spirit. But will you, therewith, get a vision of well-planned and co-ordinated, as well as of intenser, effort? Will you be able to say, not only that the people are giving magnificently of their best, but also that their energies are being directed successfully into the right channels? Or will you have to admit that what has been accomplished has been mainly the doing of the people themselves, under the impact of a terribly near approach to catastrophe, and that you and your Cabinet

colleagues have so far done little except to cheer the people on, without providing them with the means of applying their zeal to the best possible purpose?

Speaking as an outsider from the affairs of government, with no claim on your attention except that of goodwill and long association with you in the Socialist movement, I cannot help feeling that, beyond exhorting the rest of us to 'Go to it,' you and your Labour colleagues in the War Cabinet have so far done singularly little to get the nation better organised for war. You have, I agree, handed out to your supporters certain concessions which they value highly—notably, the recent modifications of the Family Means Test. But that is beside my present point. As far as I can see, the war, on its economic side, is still being conducted pretty much as it was under Chamberlain, and pretty much as it would have been conducted if Churchill had formed his Government without the inclusion of a single Socialist.

I remember a speech which you made very soon after you took office, announcing that for the future all the principal establishments in the war industries were to be taken completely under Government control. I have been unable to discover any single respect in which the position of any establishment has been altered as a consequence of this dramatic pronouncement. If you can tell me of any such change, it is more than anyone I have asked so far, from highly placed Civil Servants and Controllers to business men, has been able to do. For all I can discover, what happened as the result of your startling announcement was, simply and literally, nothing at all. The supply departments went on placing their orders with the various private contractors just as they had done

before; the business men carried on as before; your incisive words remained mere words, with no visible effect on anybody or on anything.

I agree that, on the same occasion, you announced that the rate of excess profits tax was to be raised at once to one hundred per cent; and I presume, from the loud squeals now being made by the vested interests, that in this respect something did happen—or why should there be so much talk about the need for special concessions to meet the hard case of the thwarted war-profitteer? You may take credit for your hundred per cent—though I cannot for the life of me see why it should be necessary to allow firms which are completely controlled by the State to make excess profits which have then to be recovered from them by taxation. Would it not be simpler to prevent them from making these profits in the first instance, and thus save all the trouble of claiming them back? This should surely be a simple matter, if the firms in question were really under complete control; but I fear, despite your brave words, they are not. They remain private, profit-seeking concerns, free, as suits them best, either to play each for its own hand against the others, or to enter into monopolistic combines for the purpose of jointly feathering their nests for the future at the State's expense.

Or take the related question of the 'Controls'—that is, of the Controllers and Control Boards set up, mostly in connection with the Ministry of Supply, to organise the production and distribution of a number of scarce materials and other commodities. The Chamberlain Government followed quite deliberately the policy of basing these 'Controls,' wherever it could, on the existing capitalist combines—of putting

the steel magnates to control steel, and so on. The capitalist combines, in many cases, practically became the 'Controls'—much to the annoyance of firms outside them, which had now to tell their rivals their trade secrets and depend on their bounty for necessary supplies. You were, I seem to remember, highly critical of this curious arrangement when it was made by the Chamberlain Government. But what have you done to alter it—you and your fellow-Socialists—since you came into a share of power? You have done nothing. The Controllers are still where they were. A large part of the wartime organisation of industry is still in the hands of men whose reputations are based on their success in restricting output and "eliminating surplus productive capacity" in the interests of monopoly capitalism.

Perhaps you will answer that you have left these things as they were because any basic change in the status of capitalist industry or in the methods of State control might have upset the continuity of war production at a time when a bird in the hand was worth a dozen in the bush. I can see that there was much in this view, in the situation which existed just after the fall of France, when immediate invasion seemed likely, and the imperative need was to replace at top speed the vast quantities of war equipment lost in the evacuation of our army from the continent. But conditions have altered very greatly since the days of June. Then it was a question of getting the largest possible quantity of munitions turned out complete within the next few weeks, and even from day to day. There was no time to think of anything besides that, or to set about measures of reorganisation, however desirable. To that situation, appeals to the workers

to work all hours, in order to achieve the maximum results with the means already to their hands, were entirely appropriate. But such methods were, of their very nature, only stopgaps. The pace set was not one which could possibly be kept up for more than a short time; and it was all the more necessary, before it slackened off, to devise more durable means of increasing output, by improved organisation and a more thorough concentration of suitable plant and labour upon the most essential tasks.

To-day, Dunkirk—the glorious saving of the men, the loss of their arms, and of many more that had been piled up in the expectation of war in France—is an old story. *Blitzkrieg* from the air has been powerless to create any such crisis in our armaments as existed on the morrow of the French collapse. We have been saved from the peril of an invasion that would have caught us utterly unequipped, and have been given time to look at the state of our defences in a mood less flustered, in which extemporisation is no longer the best policy. The essential task has changed from maximising output over weeks, or days, to planning it for a year, or two or three years, ahead; and the vital question has come to be that of so improving our methods of economic organisation as to ensure the best possible use of our productive resources in the long run. This stage had been reached at any rate by mid-September—getting on for six months ago. But, whereas you and your colleagues faced manfully your earlier task of urging the workers on to almost superhuman feats of immediate production, you have done nothing since. You have not tackled the second, the more exacting, part of your problem. You appear rather as if, having appealed to the

workers to sweat their guts out in the cause of national defence, you can see no sufficient cause for doing anything further, even though in the nature of things your earlier appeal could have but a transitory effect, and any attempt to sustain it would be bound, by inducing sheer exhaustion, to lessen output in the long run and thus defeat your hopes.

Yet you and your Labour colleagues can hardly be satisfied now with methods of economic organisation which you were condemning loudly only a few months ago. If you have ceased to press for a change of method, it must be because you are afraid of destroying national unity, or, alternatively, because you cannot get the consent of your non-Socialist Cabinet colleagues to changes which you think desirable, but they do not. Is it on either of these grounds that you are acquiescing in the continuance of 'Chamberlainism' on the economic front? If either of these be your reason, I entreat you, when you have stood back and looked your fill at the present state of our war industries, to think again. 'National unity' is, after all, valuable only to the extent to which it contributes to victory: if it impedes the war effort, it is not an asset but a liability. Moreover, what is this 'national unity' that would be imperilled if you were to set to work organising the nation better for the tasks of war? Who, precisely, would object?

The answer, I suppose, is twofold—political and economic. The political answer is that the managers of the Conservative Party would object, and the Government's majority in Parliament would be endangered. But to argue that is as much as to say that you are in the War Cabinet, not as a free agent, to serve the public cause, but as a prisoner of Toryism

—a prisoner of the party that kept Chamberlain in power as long as it dared, and brought us within inches of losing the war. There is, I fear, all too much truth in this view of your situation. The business Tories had to give way last May, and to consent that Chamberlain should give place to Churchill. But they succeeded even then in keeping Chamberlain in the War Cabinet as their watchdog; and ever since they have been throwing up fresh entrenchments for the defence of the vested interests of property and privilege. But these gentry are not really formidable—at present. They would not dare to refuse the Government any power, necessary for the conduct of the war, if the consequence of their refusal might be to fling back upon them the responsibility for governing the country, without your help. For they would not dare—at present—to make peace on any terms that Hitler would give them; and they know that they could not carry on the war without the positive collaboration of the Labour movement. They are in a cleft stick; and you—and the nation—ought to be profiting by their dilemma. If you went hard 'at them now, they would scurry for shelter. If you are their prisoner your gaol is of your own making. You can break the bars at any moment, if you will but summon up the will to be free.

Much more formidable than this political opposition is the potential resistance of the vested interests in the economic field. The bankers, the City, the great industrialists who hold their points of vantage in monopolies, combines and 'Controls' will do all they can, regardless of public interests, to obstruct any change that threatens their power of exploitation or their property rights. It is vain to bandy words with

these people; the only effective course is to hit them firmly over the head. But the required methods of dealing with them have the merit of simplicity. All that is needed is to take away their property in the instruments of production, to oust them, for the period of the war, from the key positions of economic control, leaving the question of compensation or reinstatement to be settled later, like your claim to compensation if the German bombers destroy your house, when the war is over, and we can all see better where we stand.

Naturally, I am not suggesting that you ought to kick out the expert managers of industry, and put others, necessarily less expert, in their places. That would be just silly. But the principal upholders of the vested interests are not expert industrialists, save a very few of them: they are only manipulators of high finance. They are experts only in the arts of self-enrichment and 'power economics'—arts which are of less than no value for the purposes of success in war. They are adept at making combines for holding the public to ransom, at devising schemes for the elimination of 'redundant capacity,' and at managing politicians whose help they need in putting through their little plans with a show of rotarian 'service.' These arts, just now, are, or should be, at a discount. The men who actually manage the productive processes of industry, get things made, and deliver the goods, are not these 'captains of industry,' but their lieutenants, who will work as readily (and, as I think, a good deal better) for masters who will not be haunted perpetually by fears of 'over-production,' but will praise them the more, the more they are able to get produced. When there are to be found, among the

'captains of industry,' men who are in truth industrialists rather than financial wangers, by all means employ them, in their appropriate jobs. But often it will be found that such men can be most useful in industries other than their own, in which they have no personal financial concern.

As for the bankers and the 'City' magnates, they are men of straw. Take over the banks and financial houses lock, stock and barrel: sack a few notable enemies of the people who at present preside over them; and you need fear no further trouble from that source. The art and mystery of banking is, at any rate under war conditions, no such mystery as could not be perfectly well managed without the help of such financial wizards as Montagu Norman. In truth the banking side of the war, if it were given to the office boy to run, could not well be managed worse in the public interest than it is being managed now, between the 'won'ts' of the bankers and the 'don'ts' of His Majesty's Treasury. A single direction is what is needed: given that, wartime banking is no more than a routine matter of carrying out the financial policy of the State. Granted, this simplicity is conditional on the State having a financial policy; but the existing dualism is not least noxious in that it obscures this need.

The question for you is, would the elimination of these gentry—the reputed great ones of the world of capitalism—really imperil the national unity? Would the lesser property-owners and the middle classes generally interpret the cashiering of the monopolists as so great a threat to all property rights that they would sooner surrender to Hitler than carry on with the war under conditions of real and effective public

control? Doubtless, there are some who would; but I do not believe they would be enough to matter, if the Government showed common sense as well as firmness in its handling of the change. The Government would have to say, to all employers who are really the managers of their own factories and not mere financial wirepullers, "Carry on. Your work is needed." It would have to say, "We may have to upset, in many ways, the normal conduct of your business. We may have to take away from you men, or machines, or to bring men, or machines, from elsewhere to supplement your existing capacity. We may have to close your factory down, or to expand it to three times its present size. Whatever we do will not affect your income; for you will receive in future, in lieu of your profits, a fixed salary from the State. We shall look to you, for the duration of the war, to do your best, not for the business which has hitherto been yours as against other businesses, but for the State. You are the State's servant now, and the nation's."

To such an appeal, I feel sure most business men who are producers, rather than financiers, would be ready to respond. So would, even more readily, the mass of the salaried men—managers, technicians and administrators—who would be taken over directly into the State's service. To them you would need to say, "Carry on, under our orders. You are no longer the employees of Vickers, or Armstrong Whitworth, or I.C.I., but of the State. The State will pay you your salaries, and will expect your best service in return, in your country's cause." You would have to say, to all who resisted or attempted to obstruct the new order, "Beware! If you were soldiers, guilty of

indiscipline in the face of the enemy, you would be shot. If you were looters, despoiling the victims of air bombardment, you would be gaoled at least. We want to treat you gently because we are not like Hitler, and have no wish to emulate his savagery. But we are not standing any nonsense. We cannot allow you, or anyone else, to impede the national effort."

Do you not agree that, if these things were said and acted on, and if the proposed changes were clearly shown to be necessary for the successful mobilisation of the nation for war, the vast majority of the British people would be behind you and your colleagues in the Government in giving the obstructers short shrift? What, then, are you waiting for?—for, I repeat, I cannot believe that you are under the delusion that the resources of Great Britain have yet been effectively mobilised for war. Or are you satisfied, because you are too busy with the details ever to see the whole? If that be so, I must entreat your patience a little longer, and ask you to glance at the enclosed letter, more specific in its contents, which I have addressed to your Cabinet colleague, Ernest Bevin.

Yours sincerely,
POPULUS.

III

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
ERNEST BEVIN

MEMBER OF THE WAR CABINET, IN HIS
CAPACITY AS CHAIRMAN OF THE
PRODUCTION EXECUTIVE

MY DEAR BEVIN,

How is this new Production Executive of yours getting to work? It ought to be pretty busy; for now at last we are coming to a point in the war at which having more of one thing definitely means having less of another, because of real scarcities of raw materials, machines, and certain kinds of labour—especially skilled labour. The task of so planning production as to get the right balance between different sorts of output has become about the most important task of all, from the standpoint of seeing us safely through to the end of the war. You, more than any other Minister, are called upon to hold the balance between the conflicting claims of different departments—to reckon up how many divisions of soldiers we can afford to put into the field fully armed this coming year, how many naval and merchant ships we can contrive to build (over and above repairing those which get damaged), how many aeroplanes and tanks and guns we can turn out without leaving the civil population intolerably short of supplies. You have to estimate how far the problems of

home production can be eased by bringing in goods from the United States or other places overseas and how much of our available energy we need to assign to producing exports to exchange for necessary imports. I do not mean that you have to decide all these questions off your own bat; but you are the nearest thing we possess to a general director of economic planning, and the fortune of war rests on you fully as much as on our forces in the field, which will be helpless to achieve victories unless you see to it that they are adequately supplied.

Your job is one that needs a strong man, who knows how to stand up to influential Ministers, highly placed and well entrenched Civil Servants, and insistent business men, all intent on pushing their own claims to be treated with exceptional favour. I think I can guess pretty well the sort of problems you find yourself up against all the time. First, it is pretty safe to assume that the War Office wants the largest army it can persuade the War Cabinet to allow to be called up, and puts as high as it dares the demands of the army for skilled artificers to serve in its ranks. Now, it is obvious that, the larger the army—and, of course, the navy and the air force as well—the more equipment will be needed for arming them and keeping them supplied, and therefore the larger the output of the industries producing all this equipment will need to be. There you have already your first source of interdepartmental conflict; for the more able-bodied men (and the more skilled men) the armed forces take away from industry, the harder the task of providing them with adequate armaments is bound to be.

Let us assume for the moment that the War Office

is given its head, and allowed to call up as large an army as even it wants. You are then set the task of ensuring sufficient supplies of materials, machinery and man-power to provide the armaments this force will need. How are you to find them? There are the unemployed to be drawn back into industry; and there are large reserves of women, mostly married, who do not go out to work in normal times. But these forms of man-power need training and adapting to war uses; and their presence does not solve the parallel problems of raw materials and machines, or that of skilled man-power, which is among the most difficult of all. You can meet the calls of the armed forces only by withdrawing supplies of these scarce means of production from other uses—that is, from the industries and services which provide for the needs of the civil population, and from the export trades.

But, as soon as you begin taking factories, plant, materials and skilled workers away from work on exports, along comes the Treasury, probably hand in hand with the Board of Trade, and protests. "My dear Bevin, how on earth do you expect us to keep on paying for all these foodstuffs and materials—yes, and armaments—that you require us to import, if you won't let us have plenty of exports to pay with?" You may answer with some remark about paying in gold, or by selling off foreign securities that are marketable on foreign stock exchanges; but the Treasury will retort by asking how long you expect the supplies of gold and saleable securities to last, if they aren't spread out by providing in addition all the exports we can manage to sell. Then you may say, "Oh, but under this new scheme of Roosevelt's we shall be able to get, without payment, heaps of things we

have had to pay for on the nail up to now." And the Treasury will make answer, "Yes; if it hadn't been for that we should have had to ask you to release a lot of extra plant and men and materials for making exports, whereas now we are only asking you not to take any more away. After all, we shall have to go on paying the Dominions and the Argentine and a round dozen of other countries that aren't going to lend us something for nothing." And you will say, "Well, I must see what I can do; but the War Office says I have to find arms and supplies for x million men; and that makes things pretty difficult for everybody else."

Well, after that you go away and think things over; and let's suppose you come to the conclusion—or the Cabinet does for you—that you have to set aside for making exports rather more materials and machines and skilled man-power than you had originally allowed for. What follows? Simply that, if the War Office's demands are to be met, you have to cut down still further the amounts of materials, machines, and skilled man-power that you can allot to meeting the needs of the home population. If the War Office is to have an army of x millions, and it takes the labour of y millions to supply an army of that size, and z millions are needed for producing exports to pay for necessary imports, all that will be left to supply the home consumers will be the total number of workers *minus* x , *minus* y , *minus* z ; and similarly with factories, and machines, and materials—to say nothing of special bottlenecks in the supply of particular kinds of machinery, or materials, or skilled labour.

If you tackle your problem that way on, taking the demands of the army, the navy, and the air force as

data—things given and not to be questioned—and coming to the home consumers last of all, you will almost certainly arrive at an impossible conclusion; for the odds are that there will not be enough producing power left over to keep the civil population even barely alive. So you will have to go to the War Office and say, "Sorry; but you can't have all these men you wanted for the army, because if you do we shan't be able to equip them." And the War Office will say, quite indignantly, "What the hell d'you mean? We ciphered it all out for ourselves; and there will be plenty of civilians left to make all the supplies we want, allowing for those you are going to import for us from the United States." And you will answer, "But haven't you forgotten that civilians need to consume as well as produce? They have to have something to live on, after all." And the War Office will scratch its head and say, "Oh, *them!*"

Of course, I don't mean that as an exact picture of what happens; but my guess is that it does, broadly, represent the truth. At any rate, your job, as Chairman of the Production Executive, is to face up to all the conflicting demands of all the different departments, so as to ensure two things—first that our total production of all sorts shall be as large as we can make it by using all our resources of factory-space, materials, machines, and man-power, skilled and unskilled, women as well as men, to the best possible purpose; and secondly that our total economic effort shall be distributed in the best possible way, between supplying the armed forces, keeping the civil population equipped with necessary goods and services, and producing for export with these ends in view.

Are you doing that essential job? Have you in your

mind a clear picture of the right allocation of productive resources to these various uses? Have you and your staff of helpers worked the whole thing out into a comprehensive plan of production which, having made, you can modify from day to day in the light of experience and as conditions change? If you have such a plan in your mind, are you getting it accepted by the various departments through which it has to be carried into effect? Are you keeping a tight hold on each department, in order to make sure that it shall do neither too much nor too little and shall do what it has to do with the least possible interference with the efforts of others? Are you reasonably satisfied that, on the whole, the available productive resources of Great Britain are being used to the full, and applied to the best practicable uses? Even if you are, I am not. I can see no sign that either you, or those who work with you, have yet made a comprehensive plan—much less that you are within sight of getting it carried into effect.

So far, I have been making your problem sound a good deal simpler than it really is. You have in practice to decide, not only between arms and exports and goods for home consumption, but also, within each of these forms of output, between one thing and another. When Lord Beaverbrook wishes to darken the skies with Spitfires and Hurricanes, it is your business to remind him that the army is crying out for tanks and guns. When the Lords of Admiralty put in for vast fleets of small naval vessels, it is your business to remind them of the rate at which merchant ships are being sunk or damaged, and of the need for replacing this wastage. When the War Office demands so many fully mechanised units, it is your

business to call attention to the imperative need for farm tractors, fire engines, and first-line and training planes. And so on, through the entire gamut of competing forms of production, which use up the same types of materials, machines, and skilled labour. Pill-boxes and concrete runways for planes *versus* deep shelters; foodstuffs *versus* fodder for animals at home, civilian *versus* army clothing, house-repair after air-raids *versus* factory buildings and works of defence—all along the line it is a question of this against that, of one thing *versus* another—or rather of so much more of one thing *versus* so much more of another. Not merely of guns *versus* butter, but of everything *versus* everything else, as far as things are made of interchangeable materials, or with interchangeable machines, or by interchangeable types of labour, or as far as they use up valuable transport space, or supplies of foreign exchange.

Your job is to reduce all the rival claims to order and proportion, in relation to the total supply that can be produced or brought in from abroad. On what principles, I wonder, are you setting about it? The problems have not, for the most part, been very difficult so far, because the most essential part of them has hardly been tackled at all. So far, we have not been using—it hardly appears that we have even been trying to use—our entire productive resources to the full. We have been slow as slow in absorbing the unemployed into useful work; we have allowed coastal towns to be evacuated and danger zones to be bombed without any systematic effort to transfer productive capacity elsewhere; we have allowed plant and labour in declining trades to remain idle without any prompt attempt to divert it to alternative uses. The main

shortages so far have been of specialised things—of certain materials, certain types of machine tools, certain sorts of highly skilled labour—rather than of labour, or plant, or materials generally. But now, with growing armies to supply, and the prospect of still larger armies and more active warfare in the near future; with an awareness at last of the huge scale on which we need to turn out aeroplanes and every sort of war material; with *blitzkrieg* by sea as well as by air making imports more difficult and continuous work at home more liable to interruption; we are at last coming up against the problems of all-round shortage.

Your job becomes, at this stage of the war, immensely harder and more important. Are you facing up to it? Are you holding the balance aright between conflicting claims, and telling the rival pundits where they get off?

The soldiers will say to you, "The army must come first." Lord Beaverbrook will say, "Get out of my way. I want planes, and I don't give a damn what happens to anything else as long as I get 'em." Alexander, I fancy, will be more open to reason, because he is a leading Co-operator as well as First Lord of the Admiralty, and has the ordinary consumers' needs in mind, as well as the navy's. But he too will be wanting ships for the fleet, and, in a second capacity, merchant ships too.

It is your job to meet these various demands as far as they can be met, but not to the extent of subjecting the civil population to an unbearable strain. Do not forget, in measuring one claim against another, the oft-repeated phrase that in this war the whole population is in the front line. The civilians, equally with the

soldiers, need good food, warm clothing, and a tolerable share in the means of averting boredom. They cannot, under the strains to which they are subject, be pushed into a corner and told to manage as best they can. If they are bombed out of their homes, they have to be assured of alternative accommodation. Leave them underfed, ill-clothed, and under-amused; and they will catch diseases, in mind as well as in body. They have plenty of native courage: they have shown it by the way they have stood up to being bombed. But courage has to be nourished, or it cannot be sustained. Courage is a physical as well as a moral quality. Too much strain will break any people. Beware lest you allow the military pundits to take away so large a part of the nation's productive resources as to leave too little to nourish the spirit of the people.

I am not suggesting that this has happened. The danger point is still in the future. But I am certain that the danger is there, and that it will take a strong and sensible man to beat it back. Are you strong and sensible? It is not merely a question of your personal prowess in giant-killing, though that is important enough. It is also a question of you, or some other giant-killer, having behind you the right organisation for doing the job. Now, despite the recent reorganisation which has put you in charge of this vital task, you appear to have behind you no proper equipment—almost, no equipment at all—for your colossal task. You have, I believe, a secretariat of sorts—a few tame economists whom you keep somewhere at hand, and a few Civil Servants who have been delegated to do your bidding. But have you at your back anything in the nature of a planning department, well enough equipped to make an independent check of the claims

submitted to your Production Executive by the rival departments represented upon it? Have you lieutenants of enough courage and standing to go and tell a General, or a Permanent Secretary, or, if need be, a Cabinet Minister where he gets off? Is your influence felt and feared daily in every department that is concerned with using up some part of the nation's productive resources?

Frankly, I doubt it. I doubt if you have yet really faced up to the job; for if you had, you would surely have realised before now that the job cannot be done without proper tools. Whom have you, higher up than the office boy, to share your worries and to act on your behalf? You are 'Chairman of the Production Executive' and you are also Minister of Labour and National Service. In this second capacity, you have behind you the largest body of Civil Servants that is attached to any Minister, except the Postmaster General. But, as 'Minister for Production'—for that is how you need to regard your new office—you appear to have behind you very nearly nothing.

What you need is a properly staffed Planning Department, absorbing into itself the various bodies which exist to deal with such matters as 'priorities' in the supply of materials, machine tools, ships and shipping space, scarce man-power, and anything of which there exists, or is likely to arise, a serious shortage. You need strong men around you in this department, and you need a general authority, delegated to you by the War Cabinet, to override departmental obstacles and to act as a co-ordinating Minister for all questions of production. Until you have such a department behind you, you can do no more than make a pretence of carrying out your job;

for you can know only what the other departments choose to tell you, and that will be only what it suits them that you shall know. It will be beyond your power to check what they say, or to form, on a basis of real evidence, an independent judgment of your own. One of the most vital needs of war organisation will, therefore, fail to be met; and you will be to blame for having failed to see that it is met.

As matters stand, my dear Bevin, you will not be able to prevent production from being a matter of pull devil, pull baker, between one department and another. You are not in a position to do the job which is supposed to be your primary function in the national war effort. You are in danger of allowing yourself, by trying to ride two horses at once, and by taking on your new job without a proper staff, or adequate powers in relation to your colleagues, to become a barrier in the way of those who want that essential job to be done. Do you, or do you not, believe in economic planning? Do you, or do you not, realise that from the standpoint of effective planning of the economic side of the war, yours is the key position? My dear Bevin, please either pull up your socks and insist on being given power to do the job properly, or, if you are refused that power, hit back, and do not let yourself be made the catspaw of men who would sooner lose the war than suffer the 'rights of property' to be subordinated to the needs of the people.

Yours sincerely,

POPULUS.

IV

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE SIR ANDREW DUNCAN

MINISTER OF SUPPLY

DEAR SIR ANDREW,

When I first became aware of your existence, a good many years ago, you were, if I mistake not, a Glasgow lawyer, recently appointed secretary to the Ship-building Employers' Federation. I encountered you next as Coal Controller, during the difficult times for the coal industry which followed the last Great War. I do not know what you were doing after that, until you reappeared as Chairman of the new Central Electricity Board, with the important task of planning and constructing the 'grid.' From that post you presently flitted yet again, to become Chairman of the reorganised Iron and Steel Federation, with the job of tidying up the iron and steel industry behind the tariff wall erected for it by the National Government as a bulwark against foreign competition. You were still at that job when the war came; and after a while you were whisked away to become President of the Board of Trade—an office which you surrendered a few months ago in order to succeed Herbert Morrison as Minister of Supply, the capacity in which I am now addressing you.

Yours has been a meteoric career, and one that pays tribute to your reputation as a business organiser.

You have been shifted about from one industry to another, wherever exceptional capacity in organising this or reorganising that has been called for. You have served Mammon in a number of important capacities; and in the course of your odyssey you have, more than once before, been required to serve the State. Your career is in itself an object lesson in the importance, under modern conditions of production, of a kind of business capacity that is based, not on knowledge of any particular industry or technique, but on a more generalised power to make those who have this knowledge carry out your will.

I do not know enough about you personally to say with any confidence what sort of man you are, or what are your inner thoughts. But I am writing to you on the assumption that what interests you most in life is not making money, for yourself or for those who employ you, but doing competently the job to which you have set your hand. I cannot credit you with caring much whether the job happens to be good or bad, in the sense of furthering or hindering the happiness of ordinary men and women; but I venture to hope that, when the State employs you, you are ready to serve the State as conscientiously and with as much ability as you have served the shipbuilders, the steel combines, or any other group of capitalists with which your lot has temporarily been cast.

What are you trying to do, now that you are Minister of Supply, and have charge of that very curious department, built up under Chamberlain by Leslie Burgin, and then for a time presided over by Herbert Morrison, who did not greatly change its general character before he was translated elsewhere? Are you, too, going to leave it pretty much as it is, or have

you ideas about it, as you have had ideas in each previous new job that you have taken in hand?

The Ministry of Supply is undoubtedly a very extraordinary department—or rather, a whole bundle of departments largely independent one of another, but loosely tied together under your authority. One of these departments, the most directly under your governance, is concerned with placing contracts, chiefly for the War Office, but also to some extent for the other fighting services. The rest of your kingdom consists of a large number of more than half independent ‘provinces’—the various ‘Controls.’ Each of these ‘Controls’ holds sway over a particular raw material or semi-finished or finished product, or over a particular kind of factory, and each is headed by a Controller, or occasionally a Control Board, responsible in the last resort to you. One or two Controllers are in charge of factories owned and run by the State—the Royal Ordnance Factories, for example. But most of them are controlling groups of private, profit-making businesses; and the odd thing is that in many cases the Controller has been chosen from among the very people whom it is his job to control, and that the ‘Control’ is very apt to be only another name for the pre-war capitalist trust or combine, which now operates compulsorily with the State’s authority—your authority—behind it.

This ‘set a thief to catch a thief’ principle seems to me to be inherently bad. When you were set, in pre-war days, to reorganise electricity supply and later the steel industry, and when you were Coal Controller before that, one of your principal qualifications for these jobs was that, to the best of my belief, you had no financial interest in any of these industries,

but came to them as an outsider, with an attitude of impartiality between the various capitalist groups with which you had to deal. I should have supposed that impartiality, in this sense, ought to be regarded as an indispensable quality in any person appointed to control any industry or material as the representative of the public. But in this war the 'Controls' are stuffed to overflowing with interested persons, who can hardly be supposed to have shed all their partialities merely because they have changed their labels, and are now temporarily drawing their salaries from the State.

I suppose that the argument for this policy is that 'steel men' know best about steel, 'cement men' about cement, and so on. Of course, I agree that it is plain common sense to employ in the various 'Controls' the services of men who possess the appropriate kinds of technical knowledge, including unavoidably men who have been hitherto in the employment of the various capitalist combines. But I contend that such persons ought never to be given authority to formulate policy. That ought to be in the hands of men who are not, and do not expect to be after the war, interested parties in the industry concerned. By all means put a 'steel man,' if he has the right personal qualities, to control timber, or cheese, or anything else you like, except steel. By all means use 'steel men' as advisers to the Steel Controller, irrespective of their previous affiliations. But never on any account transmogrify Mr. X., who was in peacetime the leading figure in the steel ring, into His Majesty's Controller of Steel. Mr. X. may be altogether a most virtuous, as well as a most competent, person; but he would need to be a superman to be able to so change his spots as to become a suitable public agent for

controlling the industry out of which he has made his money, and probably hopes in future to make more.

I should like you, then, to clean up the 'Controls,' which, during his tenure of office, Herbert Morrison failed to touch; and I should like you to pick, for your new Controllers, men who cannot be even suspected of any personal interest in the industries which they are to control, or of being put there as the watchdogs of the great capitalist monopolies. But this is only a part of the work of your department; and I think there are changes at least as great needed in the section of it which is most directly under your personal administration—I mean that which deals with the placing of contracts for war materials. In this field, your department started by taking over already established relations with a number of contractors who were accustomed to working for the War Office, or the other service departments, in time of peace. War preparation, and still more actual war, has required that the Ministry of Supply shall place enormously larger contracts with these established firms, and shall aid them in building 'shadow' factories and expanding their plant on a very considerable scale. These Government contractors, in their turn, have been in the habit of placing sub-contracts with a number of other firms; and, in face of the increased volume of Government orders, they have naturally placed much larger sub-contracts, both with the same firms and with others which they have sought out for themselves by whatever methods have seemed to promise the best results, from the standpoint of each particular contractor. At the same time the Ministry of Supply has been fast extending its list of direct contractors, either on its own initiative, by

seeking out new firms, or by accepting the offers of firms which are anxious to get war work to take the place of lost orders for goods for the civilian market or for export. The range of contractors and of sub-contractors is continually being extended, as more and more firms are drawn, in one way or another, into the war effort.

I think you will have to agree with me that, at any rate until quite lately (and perhaps even now) this extension of the range of Government work has been done on a rather haphazard basis. Each main contractor has been left free to pick up sub-contractors pretty much at random; and the acceptance of direct contracts by the Ministry of Supply has been largely a matter of lobbying at headquarters, and has not been organised in any scientific way. At any rate, small and middle-sized firms have got the impression that, if they want contracts, they had better employ an agent in London, or 'contact' with somebody who is in on the ground floor, and that they stand little chance of getting their works continuously employed on Government orders unless they either attach themselves permanently to one of the recognised contractors or pay a rake-off, by way of commission, to somebody who is in the know.

These haphazard methods (or are they deliberate on somebody's part?) have, I am sure, involved a great waste of productive capacity. Mr. A., who is a manufacturer in a small or middling way of business, tenders either directly to the Ministry of Supply or to one of the main contractors for a particular order, and gets a contract, or sub-contract, that will keep his factory busy for so many weeks. He has then to set to work, making the jigs and tools that are required

for the carrying out of this particular order. This takes up a good deal of time, and uses up a good deal of a particularly scarce factor of production—skilled labour. Common sense would dictate that Mr. A., having got these jigs and tools made, should thereafter have his factory continuously employed in turning out the goods which they can be used to produce, mainly with the less skilled, and less scarce, types of labour. But it has happened on far too many occasions that when Mr. A. has fulfilled, quite satisfactorily, his initial order, the repeat order for the same type of goods has gone, not to him, but to Mr. B., who has thereupon set to work, with a quite unnecessary use of skilled labour and machinery, to make precisely the same jigs and tools as are by now lying idle in Mr. A.'s establishment.

This has happened, on far too many occasions, both with direct contracts placed by the Ministry of Supply and with sub-contracts, or sub-sub-contracts, placed through the main contractors. I believe that, during Herbert Morrison's term of office, the prevailing system of re-tendering at frequent intervals was considerably modified, in the case of direct contracts placed by the Ministry. But it went on in the case of sub-contracts and sub-sub-contracts; and little was done to alter a system, or lack of system, which allowed, say, a Glasgow contractor to place his sub-contracts in Southampton or Norwich, while a Southampton contractor was placing in Glasgow sub-contracts which could have been equally well executed by a sub-contractor in his own town. The Ministry of Supply did not even know (does it now?) what sub-contractors its main contractors were employing, or on what jobs; and firms touted vainly for orders

which they were well equipped to execute even while firms which had the orders were falling badly behind-hand with deliveries for want of the requisite machines or supplies of skilled workers.

This confusion was, I feel sure, largely the consequence of an attempt to apply peace-time methods under war conditions. In time of peace it is necessary to play off one contractor against another, to put work up continually to re-tender, and to keep each contractor uncertain whether he will get a repeat order or not, in order to keep costs down to the minimum. But this method is altogether wrong under war conditions, when the essential thing is to get the largest possible total deliveries of finished goods. Under war conditions, the right way of keeping down costs is not to shift orders continually from one contractor, or sub-contractor, to another, but to control prices or, better still, to take over completely the firms which possess the equipment for producing the goods. This is the right method because, in view of the total shortage of machine tools and skilled tool-room workers and machine setters, it is indispensable to keep firms at work continuously producing the kinds of goods they are best able to produce, and thus to reduce the demands on skilled labour and scarce machines to the absolute minimum. Anything else means waste and delay—idle machines, and the hoarding of scarce types of labour by firms which hope to secure more contracts in the future, and will hang on to their skilled workers in that hope, even if for weeks or months on end they are doing nothing that is worth while from the standpoint of the national war effort.

I do not deny that some attempt has been made, in recent months, to amend this situation. There has

been some decentralisation at the Ministry of Supply, designed to make it easier for the smaller firms to secure war contracts; and there has been more readiness to accept collaboration in tendering for war orders among small firms not on the regular list of contractors. The policy of 'dispersal,' adopted in face of intensified air attack, has aided this process of decentralisation, and has spread Government orders to a number of firms which had previously petitioned for them in vain. But I still get the impression that the process is much too haphazard, and that a good deal of potential productive power is being allowed to run to waste.

Another aspect of this same problem is the tendency both of your Ministry and of the Ministry of Aircraft Production to place orders and to lay out new factories with almost no regard for the problems of labour supply. It is nothing unusual—indeed, it is almost the general rule—to find that the location of new war factories, or of factories transferred out of danger zones, has been settled without any consideration for the difficulties of housing the workers needed in these establishments, or transporting them daily to and from work. Some areas, not exceptionally dangerous and well supplied with labour, have been left absurdly short of factories equipped for war production, and of orders; while into other areas new factories have been crammed regardless of any consideration of the problems of labour supply. Valuable labour and materials have been wasted in building new factories in unsuitable locations, where existing factories could have been adapted to war use, and existing supplies of labour employed on the spot. It is doubtful whether, if the location of new

factories had been settled by throwing dice, or by tossing up, the choice could have been much worse than it has turned out in practice to be.

I am not thinking in this respect only of Royal Ordnance Factories, or Filling Factories, or other establishments erected chiefly by the Ministry of Supply. I am thinking still more of the private contractors, who have been allowed, for the most part, to locate new factories and extend existing ones at their pleasure without any effective attempt at co-ordinated control. I am thinking of 'shadow' factories, placed alongside old ones, without rhyme or reason, and in plain disregard, in one instance after another, of the most elementary prescriptions of common sense.

You are not responsible for these errors, because you were not Minister of Supply when they were made. But it is your responsibility to do what you can to remedy them. I suggest to you that the obvious moral of the muddles that have been made is that the individual firm, as it exists in time of peace, is the wrong unit for the organisation of production in time of war. It may be that, for peacetime production, the best thing is to have, in such places as Coventry or Birmingham, a large number of separate engineering firms, each with its own supply of machine tools and skilled labour, and its own business connections. But don't you agree that, in wartime, when the State is the sole purchaser of most engineering products and the only limit to the output needed is the sky, it would be much more efficient to be able to treat all the plant and all the labour in such a town as Coventry as a common pool, to be used for war production quite regardless of the peacetime ownership of this or that workshop or machine, or of the fact that a

particular worker has been employed by this or that employer? Would it not lead to much better results if there were full freedom to transfer workers, or jobs, from one firm to another, and to make a single, comprehensive plan of output for all the factories in Coventry, or in Birmingham, regarded as a unified public concern?

I am sure it would; and I am sure too that it would be much easier, under these conditions, to assign to the small establishments, right down to the one-man shops, their proper places in a general plan of war output. Why don't you try this method, even now, when a fresh opportunity is presented to you under the stimulus of air attack? It involves much more decentralisation than has been practised hitherto, and therewith a breaking up of orders to great firms which have their establishments scattered over a number of areas. But would this be any loss? Might it not, on the contrary, mean a very considerable gain?

Is the reason why attempts at decentralisation and, therewith, regional and local co-ordination have been so feeble that the Ministry of Supply still regards itself as bound to respect the separate existence of each capitalist unit, with a view to preserving its integrity for a resumption of its normal profit-making activities after the war? Have you any right, as a servant of the public, to regard such considerations, if they stand in the way of getting the largest possible output of munitions, here and now? You have not hesitated to drive surplus firms out of business when you have been acting as the agent of the great capitalist combines which have employed you in the past. Why hesitate now, when your employer is the State, and the nation's safety is in the balance?

I should like to see you come before the War Cabinet with a comprehensive plan for taking over, completely and so as to obliterate altogether the lines of demarcation between the separate private firms, all the factories which your department needs for the production of every sort of war supply. I should like to see you propose to put everyone concerned with the management of these factories on a fixed, wartime salary, and to compensate all owners and shareholders by the payment of fixed incomes in lieu of profits for the duration of the war, leaving the future ownership of the establishments and the basis of compensation to be settled later, when the results of the experiment can be more clearly seen. I should like to wipe profits out altogether for the duration of the war, and to make every person engaged in the war industries a direct employee of the State, with no financial interest in the affairs of the factories in which, in the national interest, they are called upon to serve.

I should like to see this because, if you had all these private establishments under your control—as you have the National Filling Factories and the Royal Ordnance Factories which the State has built and owns—you would be in a position to carry through a comprehensive programme of supply on a basis which would be much more economical in the use of scarce machines, scarce factories, and scarce supplies of skilled labour. You would be able to cut out tenders, sub-contracts, and all the rest of the business of playing at profit-making under war conditions. You could then lay your plans exclusively on the basis of the technical suitability of plants for the execution of various types of work. Of course, this would involve

a large amount of decentralisation, with the local and regional organisations replacing the capitalist firms as the units of munition supply. Through these local organisations you would be able to make much better use than is made at present of the resources of the smaller factories and workshops. It would be a question rather of making and linking up local and regional plans of production than of trying to organise everything *ab initio* from Whitehall—or wherever the headquarters of your Ministry may happen to be. Your Ministry is over-centralised now, because it is trying to work through the great capitalist combines. It needs breaking down; but the private firm, or capitalist business, is about the worst possible unit to treat as the basis for the controlled organisation of production in time of war.

I ask you to clean out the Augean stables of your Ministry—to sack the Controllers who have axes to grind; to stop all this nonsense of tendering and sub-contracting and chopping and changing between contractors; to take over the establishments you need for your production programme lock, stock and barrel; to eliminate war profits altogether, and to ignore the barriers between firm and firm in assigning tasks to different factories; to put everyone whose work you need, from labourer to managing director, on a fixed salary; and to decentralise your department, so as to make the locality, instead of the firm, the unit of productive organisation. Nor is this all; for I also ask you, as the servant of the public, not to play exclusively for your own, or your department's hand, but to be ready to work in with a general economic plan, in which the claims of your factories will be weighed against those of others, concerned with other aspects of the common

economic effort. I ask this of you, believing that you are not so much a devotee of the rights of property, or an upholder of class privilege, as a professional business organiser, with no particular political convictions, but with a liking for seeing a job competently done, and a readiness to work for one master as soon as another. Your master now is the people: look to it that you serve the people as well as you have served your capitalist employers.

Yours sincerely,
POPULUS.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
ERNEST BEVIN

MEMBER OF THE WAR CABINET, IN HIS
CAPACITY AS MINISTER OF LABOUR AND
NATIONAL SERVICE

MY DEAR BEVIN,

Most people think of you as Minister of Labour; but you are officially Minister of Labour and National Service, in addition to your offices as a member of the War Cabinet and Chairman of its Production Executive. On you, as Minister of Labour, falls the responsibility of ensuring that enough labour of the right kinds is made available for every essential occupation; and, as Minister of National Service, you are in charge of the Schedule of Protected Occupations, which determines what men are to be released for military service, and what types of workers are to be reserved for civilian employment. You have, moreover, the main responsibility for seeing that new workers are trained both to man the rapidly growing armaments industries and to take the places of men who are drafted into the army. With all this, you have to handle wages questions, to prevent stoppages of work through trade disputes, and to work out a policy for the regulation of wartime wages and conditions in face of rising prices, constant migration of workers from place to place or from trade to trade, and the upsets

of relative earnings resulting from varied workshop practices and the differing conditions of labour from factory to factory. 'Welfare,' both in and outside the factories, is yet another of your preoccupations; and, last but not least, you have to mind the unemployed—the hundreds of thousands who are still out of jobs despite the growing shortage of labour.

This is a formidable range of tasks, and it puts you at the head of an enormous staff of officials, with divisional and branch offices all over the country at the various Employment Exchanges. Much more than any other Minister, you ought, if your staff serves you aright, to be in daily contact with movements of opinion and feeling among the people, to have your finger on the pulse of Labour, and to be well equipped for setting promptly right whatever goes amiss. Yours, too, is the duty of keeping in constant touch with the Trade Unions and with the associations of employers, both generally and in the separate industries with which you have to deal.

Clearly, in such an office as yours, the danger is that you may fail to keep a tight enough hand on the hosts of responsible officers who deal each with a particular aspect of the labour problem. While you are attending to welfare or the prevention of disputes, the wages question may be getting out of hand, or training may be inadequately managed, by one of your many subordinates. Or you may, if you try to keep an eye on all that your department is doing—to say nothing of your other preoccupations—become so immersed in a welter of special problems as to have no chance of surveying the work of your Ministry as a whole.

Do you feel confident that you have successfully

/

avoided these opposite dangers, and reasonably satisfied with what you have done? I, looking at the work of your department from outside, and hearing you frequently criticised for sins of both commission and omission, do not feel altogether happy about the work of your Ministry at certain key points.

What are the charges against you? You are being attacked, openly or insidiously, along more than one line. On the one hand you are accused of regimenting the workers without imposing any equivalent regimentation on the employing class. You are said to be holding down wages artificially, without any adequate means being taken to keep down the cost of living, and also without enough restriction on the employers' profits. You are charged with arbitrarily forcing workers to go and work where you send them, often at considerable loss as well as inconvenience to them, and with allowing employers, when they are compelled to give up some of their skilled workers, to victimise men they dislike by choosing which particular workers they will release. On the other hand, you are charged by quite different persons with undue reluctance to use your compulsory powers—with allowing wages to remain a chaos, and with refusing to send men to work where they are needed for fear of raising against yourself the cry of 'industrial conscription.'

Now, it is a plain fact that, if the war is to be won, it is imperatively necessary that the available supplies of labour, especially skilled labour, be put to the best possible use. We simply cannot afford to allow highly skilled workers to waste their energies on unessential jobs, or on any job that can be done by persons of lesser skill. We cannot afford to have factories left

idle, or valuable plant under-used, for lack of workers, or to leave unfilled the gaps that are made when workers are taken away for the armed forces, or passed on to jobs in which they are needed even more. Someone must be continually shuffling round scarce types of labour in order to make them go as far as possible, upgrading less skilled men to more highly skilled work, diluting labour to the furthest extent compatible with efficient production, and ensuring that an ever-growing stream of fresh workers, who are bound to be mainly women, is getting trained fast enough both to fill up the vacant places and to staff the new factories and extensions of existing factories that are continually being got ready to begin production.

These things simply have to be done, and to be done quickly; and they cannot be done without a lot of ordering people about. They cannot be done without breaking down a great many cherished safeguards and established practices that have been built up in times of peace. There has to be migration of labour on a vast scale, both from one part of the country to another and from trade to trade. There has to be substitution of women for men in a great many types of work in which women are not ordinarily employed. Above all, the highly skilled workers, who are the scarcest and most valuable, have to be ordered about most of all; for the new and extended factories cannot produce unless they are given their appropriate complement of tool-room operatives and skilled machine-setters; and these key men must therefore be spread as thinly as possible over the whole range of establishments producing munitions of war.

One way of dealing with these problems would be to leave them to the forces of supply and demand—to

let employers bid up without limit the price of scarce kinds of labour, in the hope that in the long run the result would be to distribute it roughly in accordance with the nation's needs. But this would be a thoroughly bad way, and would assuredly not under war conditions lead to the desired result. Its badness was, indeed, clearly revealed during the earlier months of the war, before you took office, when employers were allowed to entice away one another's skilled workers by the offer of higher earnings. The consequence was chaos—a chaos out of which you have done something to induce order both by prohibiting such methods and by setting up a system of Labour Supply Inspectors designed to distribute skilled labour to better purpose.

The natural instinct of workmen is to object to being ordered about. Most of all do they object to being ordered about by employers who claim to act as the interpreters of their duty to the nation. They object, by instinct, to dilution schemes enforced by employers who have for years past been trying to break down Trade Union rules and regulations with the object of cheapening labour; and they object to being told by an employer that he releases them from his service in order to send them to work elsewhere. I know that, in law, the power to order a workman to go to a particular job belongs only to you, and not to the employers; but in practice the order has too often come to the workman through the employer, and the employer has been actually allowed to choose to which particular workmen it should apply. Similarly, even if dilution is introduced into a factory at your request, it is the employer who introduces it, and to a great extent settles the forms which it is to take.

Now, in face of the natural resistance of workers

to being ordered by or through these employers to do things which they would refuse to do in times of peace, the surprising thing is not that there has been some friction over these matters, but how little friction there has been. In fact, in a great many cases the Trade Unions and the workers in the shops have been more insistent in pressing for dilution than many employers, especially during the critical weeks which followed the fall of France. The workers, with much more enthusiasm than many employers, rallied to the task of beating off Hitler from the shores of Britain, and were determined that no cherished customs or traditional workshop methods should be allowed to hamper the national effort. You were happy during those weeks, my dear Bevin, in finding yourself at the head of a working people that was in no need of being driven, and cried out only to be led.

It is, however, not in man's nature to sustain a prodigious effort for very long—at any rate if the leadership for which he cries out in his exaltation is not forthcoming. It is unavoidable that, as exhaustion ensues upon intense exertion, there will be some slipping back into the old grooves. Above all, if men discover that, while they have been sweating their guts out in the national cause and letting go what they look upon ordinarily as their rights, the rest of the nation seems to have been carrying on pretty much in the old traditional way, they react. Then sets in a feeling of disillusionment which, combining with sheer weariness and nervous strain, threatens to become dangerous. A man says to himself, "What the hell am I doing this *for*?" and finds no clear answer to his question. Given a renewed threat as

insistent as that of last June, he will buckle to manfully again, but even so not quite with the same simple enthusiasm as before.

This is where the work of your department impinges most on matters of general public policy. This is where you need to act, not merely as Minister of Labour, but even more as a Member of the War Cabinet. For, as Minister of Labour, you cannot do a great deal to help men to find an answer to that "What the hell?" question. What is biting them is, first of all, that, when they show their readiness to be ordered about in the service of the State, it is not the State, but for the most part the profit-making capitalist who actually gives them their orders—and they don't trust him not to be feathering his nest, or consolidating his position for the future, at their expense. Secondly, what troubles them is that they don't know for what sort of community, here in Great Britain, they are being called upon to give of their best. They don't know what sort of community you and your Labour colleagues are meaning to build up for after the war.

Take the first point first. Surely your appeals, and your orders, would be much more effective if the State, instead of leaving the profit-making employers in possession, had taken over the whole of the war industries and converted them into a single great public service carried on, not for profit, but directly for public ends? If that had been done, a great many of your difficulties would have disappeared. For example, you could easily have introduced a national wage system, embodied in a single collective bargain between the Trade Unions and the State, with no employers' divergent opinions to complicate the issue. Such a bargain, I suggest, would have included,

in the first place, an upstanding salary for every highly skilled workman, payable irrespective of the particular factory in which he was called upon to work, and reinforced, of course, by standardised travelling and lodging allowances, whenever he was required to work away from home. It would have included standard methods of fixing and adjusting piecework prices, and standard conditions for every type of labour needed in the war industries—in all cases irrespective of the factory in which the worker was employed. Given such a standard set of conditions, you would have been able quite freely to move workers at need from one factory to another, or from place to place, without any fear of being accused of introducing 'industrial conscription.' You would have been able to get a single comprehensive training scheme carried out in the factories, without having to cajole a host of separate firms into adopting schemes, often on a most unsatisfactory basis. You would have been able to make your appeals to the workers as one servant of the State speaking to others, under the favourable conditions of a war for democracy carried on by democratic methods of public ownership and control. You would have been able to do all these things; and why should you not put yourself in a position to do them, even now?

Oh, yes, I know: to bring about such a change of policy is much beyond your authority as Minister of Labour: it is a matter for other departments. As Minister of Labour, you have to take the economic policy you are given, and make the best of it. You cannot, as Minister of Labour, tell the Minister of Supply and the Minister of Aircraft Production how they ought to be running their departments. But, as

a member of the War Cabinet, and Chairman of its Production Executive, you can, and should; for in that capacity your concern is not with one department only, but with the entire conduct of the war.

Why do you not go to your colleagues in the War Cabinet and tell them straight out that, if they expect you to mobilise the entire army of labour behind the war effort, the best thing they can do to help is to give the workers a practical assurance that they are not being conscripted for the defence of capitalism, but asked to serve in the cause of economic as well as political democracy? Tell them the best way of giving this assurance is to take the war industries out of the hands of the profit-makers and transfer them directly and completely to public management. Tell them that, if they will but do that, you will be able to move men and machines freely and easily to where they are wanted, to tidy up the wages muddle, to get a proper training scheme into operation, and to do all these things with the loyal and determined co-operation of the workers, whatever hardships and dangers they may be called upon to face.

Secondly, there is the wider question of the sort of community you and your colleagues in the Government are trying to build up. To that question you have made an attempt at an answer in one of your recent speeches. The answer you gave can be summed up in two words—Social Security. You have, in effect, promised the workers that, if they will see this war through to a successful issue, they shall not, after the peace, be allowed to want—in sickness, in disablement, in unemployment, or in old age. Above all, you have promised them—and this, I know, has been dear to you for a number of years—pensions they can live

on decently and happily when they are no longer fit for work.

That is a great deal. It means a lot to ordinary men and women—much more to most of them than any amount of talk about nationalisation or anything of that sort. I am entirely with you in wanting it—in wanting to make it, together with a proper provision for the nation's children, a first charge on the product of British industry. Nevertheless, I am not too happy about your way of putting it; for I am quite unable to believe that all these things can be done, as long as we allow our economic affairs to remain in capitalist hands. You have been, I think (pardon me if I misrepresent you) among those who have criticised proposals for family allowances on the ground that they would react adversely on wages. Are you so sure that your measures of social security would not react on wages even more adversely, if they had to be applied under the capitalist system? Already, in the existing schemes of social insurance, the capitalist State has shown itself adept at taxing the workers to pay for their own social services. Will not this occur even more if new and expensive social services are added on to those which already exist, without any fundamental change in the basis of our economic life?

You will try, no doubt, to prevent this, by putting the burden of the new taxation on the rich. But do you really believe that, under capitalism, there exists a vast, untapped wealth of taxable capacity among the rich, that can be got at without undermining the foundations of capitalism? I am sure you will agree that the main source from which the funds needed for your programme of social security will have to come is not the surplus income of the rich (though I

would of course have you take that too), but the unused power to create wealth which exists among the people, but is prevented from fructifying by the restrictive practices of a capitalism based on monopolistic scarcity. The people cannot have social security until it has broken the power of monopoly capitalism. Yet you spoke, the other day, as if you thought it could, and as if you were contemplating, along with the adoption of your programme, a continuance of capitalist production after the war.

Are you, or are you not? Or are you unwilling to raise that issue now, for fear of dividing the nation? I suspect that you do not really know yourself what you think. As a Trade Union leader, you have got used to capitalism—to negotiating with it on behalf of your members—and you find it difficult even to think capitalism away. You know too that most of your members understand and value a promise of Social Security much more than a promise of Socialism.

But . . . if they really can't have Social Security without Socialism, have you any right to promise it them without also telling them that, in order to get it, they will have to fight for Socialism—which you did not promise them?

Furthermore, I should like to ask you this question. When you promised the people Social Security, were you speaking as a member of the War Cabinet, or merely for yourself? Is squawking Kingsley, who presides at the Treasury, committed by your promise? Is Sir John Anderson committed, or Captain Margesson, or Lord Beaverbrook? Is the Prime Minister, who is also leader of the Conservative Party, committed to ensuring, when the war is over, that your promises are made good? If they are committed to support you,

as I hope they are, surely there is no time like the present. I hope you will go, here and now, to the War Cabinet, with your Social Security Bill all ready drafted, plank it down on the Cabinet table, and say, "Come, gentlemen, here is a Bill embodying those promises you authorised me to make to the people. I propose that this Bill be passed through all its stages in Parliament with the least possible delay. On that condition, I agree that some of its clauses shall come into effect only at the end of the war. But I want the whole thing passed into law now, in order that there may be no going back on the promises I was authorised to make on your behalf."

Will you do that, and, in doing it, establish your own position as the people's leader in the crusade for democracy? Your colleagues could find no good reason for refusing, if indeed they did empower you to make these promises on their behalf. Or were you, after all, speaking only for yourself, and is the Cabinet not committed at all? I wonder; and I am sure there are a great many besides myself who would very much like to know.

Yours sincerely,

POPULUS.

VI

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE CAPTAIN DAVID MARGESSON

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR

SIR,

I have never met you, and I have very little idea of the kind of person you are. All I know of you is that, before you became Secretary of State for War, you were Chief Whip of the Tory Party, and had a reputation for adroitness in managing the Tory back-benchers and the Tory machine. These are hardly the qualities which appear to be most needed in a War Secretary, especially in time of war; but maybe you have other qualifications, of which I am unaware. I hope you have; for at the War Office to-day much needs doing, both in disciplining the habitual impulses of the military mind and in making the British army an appropriate instrument of the democratic cause for which we are supposed to be waging war.

As you are new to your office, I shall not trouble you with any recital of your predecessors' misdeeds. I shall confine my observations to what needs doing now. As War Secretary, you have a double responsibility, apart from questions of military strategy, upon which I do not propose to intrude. You have to make up your mind, after arguing matters out with your generals and with other departments of State, and if necessary after an appeal to the War Cabinet itself, how large an army

you are setting out to raise, and with what equipment it needs to be put into the field; and you have also to decide, largely off your own bat, whether the British army is to be made into a fit instrument of British democracy in the struggle against Fascism, or is to remain the snob-ridden, boring institution which it is popularly supposed to be, and in certain notable respects actually is. For, despite the presence in the army of intelligent men in high positions, I fear no one can deny that it possesses among its officers more than a fair proportion of fools and snobs, or that the life of the private soldier is made quite unnecessarily boring, or that the snob-relation between men and officers is still most carefully and disastrously maintained.

I shall come back to this aspect of your job later. First, let us enquire how large an army you ought to be allowed to raise. It is a matter of plain arithmetic that, the more men you enrol in the army, the more equipment you will need for them, and the fewer people will be left to make it. It is therefore of the first importance that you shall not take men into the army faster than they can be equipped, or beyond what the country can support without putting an intolerable strain on the civil population. Up to a point, we have to take the soldiers' word for it that they must have men; but beyond that point the question ceases to be one which you or the soldiers can be left to settle, and comes to be one of balancing claim against claim, so as to make the best of our limited total resources of man-power. That point has been reached already. You have no right to call up any more men without an impartial authority deciding that they are needed in the army more than elsewhere.

How large an army must you have? That depends on what you have in mind to do with it. You clearly need as many men (together with their equipment) as are required for the defence of this country against invasion, and also for the defence of any other vital area, now under British or Allied control, that may be subject to land attack. You need, beyond this, men for campaigning in Northern Africa; but the forces required for this purpose cannot be very large, as it would be technically impossible to provision and supply very large forces in the field. For warfare under African conditions you need mechanical equipment much more than men.

The really important question is this: Are you trying to build up, on a basis of British man-power alone, an army large enough, at some future date, to invade Europe and defeat the German armies in the field, to march all over Europe as Hitler's armies have been marching this year past, and thereafter to garrison a large part of Europe for the preservation of a 'British peace'?

Again as a matter of plain arithmetic, the thing can't be done. The Germans are twice as numerous as the British; and they have, in the countries which they have conquered, vast resources of slave labour which they can use to release German man-power for the fighting line. There is not nearly enough man-power in Great Britain, even with aid from the white populations of the Dominions, to create an army nearly as large as Hitler's and to equip it and supply the civil population as well. Any such plan of campaign is ruled out by objections to which no answer is possible, because they rest on inescapable facts. As long as Hitler's power in Germany remains unbroken, it is impossible to invade

Europe on the grand scale, and will remain impossible unless the United States or the Soviet Union enters the war on our side. Even so, in the case of the United States, it would take a very long time to train and equip an army on the required scale; and, in the case of the Soviet Union, there is Japan to be thought of—and besides, counting such chickens hardly seems worth while just now.

But if large-scale invasion of Europe must be ruled out, what follows? The hope of defeating Hitler in Europe rests, not on taking his place as conqueror of a continent, but on checking him at every turn, in the hope of sickening the German people at the long strain imposed on them, while their hopes wane, and their prospects of ultimate victory recede and disappear. It lies, not in subjugating Europe, in order to impose a British peace, but in fostering European Revolution, wherever a chance occurs, and in helping the peoples of Europe to rise against Hitler, or at least to sabotage his efforts. It means working for revolution in Europe, not on terms dictated to the European peoples by British statesmen, but on their own terms, even if the revolutions they set out to make are not at all to your liking.

It is not, I agree, the War Office's business to stir up revolution in Europe, and I am not asking you to take that task in hand. But I am asking you to base your demands for the calling-up of men for the army, not on fantastic dreams of millions of British soldiers marching all over Europe, but on sober consideration of the number of men who can be spared from other tasks. It will do you less than no good to call up men, only to find that there are not enough arms for them: nor will it do you any good if you then try to force the

supply of arms at the cost of famine and a breaking of the spirit among the civil population. Under the conditions of man-power, which cannot be altered, there is an *optimum* size for the army, just as there is an *optimum* size for every other service that uses up men and resources. It is your job, in collaboration with the other service and civilian departments, to find out what that *optimum* is, and to aim at that—neither less nor more.

I am not saying that you will not need, and be able to have, an army large enough to send some of it to fight on the continent. I expect you will. But the British contingents will be needed, in such cases, rather to reinforce allied forces already in the field than for an independent invasion of Europe by British arms; and here again it seems probable that the main need will be for aeroplanes and highly mechanised units rather than for large numbers of men. This would be the position, for example, if Turkey came into the war, or if Hitler were to come to the help of the Italian forces which have been flung back from their onslaught on Greece. For help of that sort, what matters most is that the output of mechanical arms shall be sustained at the highest possible level. More armaments are needed much more urgently than more men; and, let me again remind you, every man you take away from industry makes it harder for those armaments to be supplied. At the very least, you ought to be ready to agree that the rate of calling-up for the army shall be made to depend on the actual progress made with the output of munitions, month by month: so that there may be no risk of your having in uniform more men than you are able to arm efficiently, and thus taking them away from useful work and turning them into bored idlers serving no useful purpose.

This is one aspect of your problem at the War Office. The other is that of making the army as democratic as it can be made—no easy matter, in face of its undemocratic traditions, and the instruments through which you have to work. I know all about the “great step towards democratising the army” that was made when it was decided that all (or nearly all) men called up for service should pass through the ranks before becoming eligible for commissions. I agree that that was a good thing; but I cannot find that it has made much practical difference. Among the men I know who get called up for the army, it seems to me that nearly all the ‘gents’ very speedily become officers, after passing over to cadet units, whereas ‘non-gentlemen’ called up at the same time nearly all stay in the ranks, or rise at most to be sergeants. This may, no doubt, be due to the singular coincidence that ‘gentlemen’ make much better officers than other people; but I cannot help thinking that the army’s idea of a good officer is very apt to be governed by asking who will fit in best with the social conventions of the officers’ mess.

But I ought to qualify what I have just written. It is not true that quite all my ‘gentlemen’ friends in the army have turned into officers, or even cadets. I have quite a number of friends who would certainly make quite as good officers as the others, and are just as ‘gentlemanly,’ but whose recommendations for commissions by their own commanding officers have somehow failed to get accepted at headquarters. The only thing in common among these rejects seems to be that they are Socialists of one brand or another—some of them very moderate Socialists—but known as Socialists from their past participation in the Socialist

movement. I find a widespread belief that there is someone quite high up in the War Office who goes through all the recommendations for commissions, with the object of weeding out the 'dangerous Reds.' It is even said that someone spends his time reading through back numbers of undergraduate journals, and scoring up black marks against the names of those who have ever made any sort of 'left wing' speeches in their student days.

I am not saying that this is so: it may be all a mare's nest. But I should like to be reassured that there is no bias, either of politics or of class, either authorised by you or practised by your subordinates without your effective reprimand, in the choice of men who are to hold commissioned rank. If such bias is allowed to exist, and you let yourself be a party to it, or tolerate it at all, what right have you to expect the loyal-co-operation of Socialists, or of working people? But where would you and the army be if this co-operation were not generously given?

There is a further point. Why the hell should it be an offence for an officer to associate with a private as an equal when they are off duty? Why the hell should there be all this nonsense of saluting every officer one happens to meet in the streets? Why the hell, if we are fighting this war for democracy, should your purple-faced majors and your weedy subalterns be encouraged to go about behaving as if they owned the earth, and mere privates existed only for them to wipe their feet on? I agree, the great majority of British officers do their best not to behave in this disgusting fashion. But some do so behave; and the system encourages them.

Strict discipline is as necessary in a democratic army as in any other. But discipline does not involve caste-

distinctions, or require that officers and men shall not fraternise when they are off duty. On the contrary, an army whose privates are treated as citizens and not as mere cannon-fodder is likely to be a great deal more efficient as a fighting machine under modern conditions than an army of the old, traditional kind. The old school tie is no longer a valuable weapon; and it is clearly a weapon wholly inconsistent with the spirit of democracy.

One more matter, and I shall have done. Do you realise how *bored* the army is, and that it is the War Office's fault? Why, in the name of common sense, can't you take proper steps to educate the army, or even to keep it amused? Why did the War Office do its best to smother the Army Education Corps before the war; and why has it done next to nothing to develop it even now? Why don't you encourage free discussion among the soldiers? Why don't you help them to organise their own education, and their own methods of work and play? Is it that you are afraid they might then really turn into a democratic army; and is that the very last thing the War Office wants them to be?

I confess, right honourable captain, that I have little hope of your taking any notice of what I have written; for I strongly suspect that you have been put where you are just because you are the kind of man the evil spirits at the War Office and the service clubs can rely on not to try any nonsense about democracy on the army. If I misjudge you, on the strength of your past record, I apologise; but if you are the sort of person I take you to be, I hope you will speedily be kicked out to make room, not for another Tory boss, but for someone who is enough of a democrat to make every

hair in the service clubs stand on end, and to send half the dug-out Generals in Whitehall into fits. If, on the other hand, you succeed in making the army safe against democracy for the time being, I wonder what the soldiers themselves will have to say to you after the war.

Yours sincerely,
POPULUS.

VII

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE ANTHONY EDEN

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
FOREIGN AFFAIRS

SIR,

You have at any rate one great merit in your present office. You are not Lord Halifax. You have also a second, more positive merit. When you saw how foreign affairs were being handled, under Neville Chamberlain, you resigned. That resignation, much more than anything else, gave you a reputation throughout Europe and caused you to be regarded, both abroad and at home, as the exponent of a democratic foreign policy. Whether you deserve this reputation has now to be seen: your doings, or lack of doings, while you were at the War Office, were not such as to inspire high confidence; but there, perhaps, you were out of your element. I hope you will do better now.

Foremost among the matters you will have to deal with promptly is that of Great Britain's relations with the Soviet Union. I am by no means one of those who regard the leaders of the Soviet Union as blameless for the disastrous events of the past eighteen months. I hold that the Soviet-German Pact was not merely a disaster for Europe, because it was largely responsible for precipitating the war, but also a blunder from the standpoint of the Soviet Union itself. But there is no point now in going over the past. We have to take the

Soviet Union as it is, and to make the best of a situation for which past British policy is, on any showing, very greatly to blame.

It is a plain fact that Stalin and Molotov regard all of us, from you and Churchill to Bevin and Attlee, as instruments of British imperialism. This war is, in their eyes, not a struggle of democracy against aggression, but a contest between two rival imperialisms, between which there is not much to choose. This view may seem to us fantastic, because we are very conscious of being attacked, and much more alive to the democratic elements in our own constitution and way of life than to the undemocratic features of our imperialist position in the world. But Stalin and Molotov are not thinking as we are. They regard Great Britain as the centre of an old, decaying empire, based on an obsolete form of capitalism, and Hitler's Germany as the centre of a new, challenging empire, economically much more up-to-date and founded on much more effective forms of collective organisation and control. According to the laws of economic determinism, they feel, the British Empire ought to go down before Hitler's; and then Hitler's, in its turn, ought to go down before theirs, because their forms of social and economic organisation are as far ahead of Hitler's as Hitler's are of ours. They have been prepared, up to a point, to buy peace for themselves at the price of helping Hitler to smash the British Empire, in the expectation that the Nazis will become so exhausted in the process as to fall to pieces, leaving the Soviet Union in possession of the stricken field.

It may happen so; but the view that it is bound to happen so seems to me to rest on an over-simplified version of the materialist conception of history. Hitler

came very near conquering Great Britain last summer; but I do not think he is likely to come so near again. Great Britain will hold out—and win the war, if our leaders play their cards aright. But Great Britain will not be able to win, or even to survive, without so great a transformation of British institutions and ways of life as to leave the country no longer the exemplar of what the Nazis call capitalist plutodemocracy, but the home of a Social Democracy much more advanced in its economic methods than the Soviet Union, still only halfway out of barbarism, can hope to become for a long time yet.

At least, this is what Great Britain is capable of becoming, and must become if it is to emerge victorious from the present struggle. You may say that it is none of your business as Foreign Secretary to reshape the basic institutions of Great Britain or of the British Empire. But, in fact, just as Lord Halifax used his position as Foreign Secretary to bolster up capitalism wherever he got a chance, so you can use yours to make this war much more really a war for democracy than it is to-day.

First, then, I ask you what attitude you mean to take up towards Germany and the German people. Are we fighting the German people, or only the Nazis and the revolting tyranny which they have set up over the minds and bodies of the people? The question is vital, because if we are fighting only Nazism, we can at once promise the Germans that, the moment the Nazis are overthrown, we shall have no further quarrel with them. We can promise them full freedom, without reparations or indemnities of any sort, without armies of occupation or attempts to dismember their country, to adopt any form of government they please, from

parliamentary democracy to Communism, provided only that they accept, in common with ourselves and with other countries, international control of all armed forces as a means of guarding the peace, and such other limitations on national sovereignty as the peoples of Europe may in concert deem necessary for the better development of their economic resources, and for a better way of living together as neighbours. You can say all this at once to the German people, if this is what you mean. And you can give the same message to all the enslaved and suffering peoples of Europe.

Beyond this you can say, to the Germans and to all the world, that even if Great Britain wins this war there will be after it no such thing as a British colonial empire; that all colonial territories, where they are not yet ripe for full self-government, will in future be made open equally to the citizens and Governments of all countries, subject only to the paramount claims of their native populations. You can say that Great Britain demands for its people no more than freedom to govern itself in its own way within a wider democratic federation of peoples, and is ready that the entire colonial empire shall pass under the authority of such a federation as soon as it can be brought into being. You can renounce, on Great Britain's behalf, every pretension to an 'imperialist mission,' or to a right to occupy a large part of the earth's surface by force of arms, or to enjoy any imperial privilege whatsoever at the expense of other States.

Or rather, that is what you should be in a position to say, in order to give the oppressed peoples everywhere heart of hope in the struggle against Nazi aggression. But would you be allowed to say one

tenth of it, even if it were in your own mind? You would not. Great Britain is still a long way off the War Aims which will make it possible to defeat Nazism and to lay the foundations of a new order in Europe. You yourself, I fear, still believe that it is somehow possible to re-build, on the morrow of the war, the old capitalist order of economic exploitation, and to revive in Europe the old capitalist nation-states, with no more change than the setting over them of a revised and rechristened version of that old fraud, the League of Nations.

To think in such terms nowadays is to be stone-blind to the movement of history. There is now only one basis on which capitalism can survive in Europe—a Nazi victory—and only one form in which it can survive—State capitalism on the Nazi model. True, if a patched-up peace were possible now—which it is not—capitalism of the old sort might linger on for a time, but only until the Nazis were ready to renew their onslaught, and finish it off finally. No stable capitalist peace is possible. That fact is inherent in the numerousness, discipline, compactness, and organising capacity of the German nation.

Only Socialism can withstand the Nazis. Only Socialism can make us strong enough to win the war; and only Socialism can bind the peoples together in classless communities devoted to the common pursuit of welfare, with no money-grubbers to stir up trouble, and with the power-maniacs shut up securely in asylums for the insane. Only with a Europe heading that way can the Soviet Union come to terms of abiding trust and friendship, both learning and teaching, and throwing off as baseless the fears (not baseless hitherto) of capitalist attack. These

fears have been the chief factor in driving the Soviet Union out of the true course of Socialism; and only a far-reaching change in British policy can call Stalin and Molotov back to the true course.

If you are realist enough to stand for such a policy, I hope you will speak out manfully, before it is too late. Even if you believe only half of it, stand forth manfully for what you do believe. At least tell the Soviet Union, not merely that you recognise the absorption of Eastern Poland, Bessarabia, and the Baltic States—a matter of plain commonsense—but further that never with your connivance shall anything be done to prevent any people that may choose to from joining the Soviet Union, or from setting up a Soviet Republic of its own. Tell Stalin that it is entirely a matter for the people how far Communism spreads, and that Great Britain will put no obstacles in its way. By such words and deeds it may be possible to reverse the trend of Soviet foreign policy, and to create relations of friendship between Great Britain and the Soviet Union. Nothing less is worth a rush.

At the same time, will you not begin to work, not half-heartedly, but with every instrument you can command, for revolution in Europe? I do not mean for respectable *bourgeois* revolution, or for reactionary monarchist revolution, but for the sort of revolution that arises directly out of the oppressed and outraged spirit of the peoples. Sift the refugees in this country, not merely to look for spies, but to find out every man or woman with a fine record of work for Socialism, and set to work to use every such person as a means of stirring up trouble for the Nazis, in every quarter of Europe. Put a stop, once and for all, to the crime against democracy that pens up in British concentra-

tion camps the stoutest enemies of our enemy, and leaves them raging impotently against our folly instead of helping us to defeat the oppression of their countries. You cannot hope to fight Hitler effectively with one arm tied behind your back; but that is what you are doing, in refusing to work for revolution in Europe.

I do not pretend that it can be easy, even if we change our policy, to stir up the European revolution. I think it could be done in Italy even now, if we really tried; but in the countries under German control it perhaps cannot be done at all, in any full sense, as long as the Soviet Union is working against us. That is why it is so vitally important to bring about a change in our relations with the Soviet Union—a thing which we cannot hope for unless we begin by admitting that our past behaviour in that quarter has been utterly and lamentably wrong. Great Britain cold-shouldered Litvinov when, with Stalin's assent, he was working hard for collective security in order to prevent war. Great Britain would consider collective security only on terms acceptable to British capitalism, with no regard for Soviet claims and less than no cordiality towards the Soviet leaders. Chamberlain would have been only too ready to appease Hitler at the Soviet Union's expense. This war is the penalty for that folly; and British imperialism will not escape its consequences, even if the British people, by shaking off capitalism in time, does manage to escape.

Which side will you be on, Anthony Eden, when the show-down comes? Which would you prefer—surrender to Hitler, or Socialist revolution in Europe and Socialism established in Great Britain? I wonder. You and your friends—the 'progressives' of your class and party—have a hard choice ahead of you,

though you do not yet understand what it is to be. You will have to choose between giving in to Hitler and giving up everything that you have been accustomed to regard as your birthright—the right to exploit subject classes at home and subject peoples abroad, wherever possible in a gentlemanly way, but to exploit them all the same. Now you have to choose between giving this up and sheer disgrace—such as has fallen on Pétain and his Vichy supporters, and through them on the fair name of France.

I credit you with loving your country, and valuing its fair name. According to your lights, you are a humane and high-minded man. You hold a historic name, known all over Europe, and a reputation which has run a long way ahead of anything you have actually done. Quite soon, it will be possible to say certainly of what stuff you are made. In your new job you will not be able to mark time, as you did at the War Office. You will have to act—for good or ill. I hope you will study carefully the advice which Stafford Cripps sends you from Moscow, and will ask him to be frank and comprehensive in advising you. Probably you will dislike what he tells you; but, should you set it aside, I shall not be at all surprised if it falls to him later, as your successor, to carry it out.

Yours sincerely,
POPULUS.

VIII

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE L. S. AMERY

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INDIA

MY DEAR AMERY,

Whenever I catch sight of you, you seem to be bobbing up and down like a jack-in-the-box. You are an energetic, excitable little man, always in a great hurry about something or other. But you don't appear to be in any great hurry about India, do you? Now, why?

One possible explanation is that you are an imperialist, and still believe in nigger-driving. But I doubt if that is really the root of the matter. My guess at your character is that you haven't any very deeply rooted principles of action, but pick your convictions up pretty much as you go along. I haven't forgotten, if the public has, that you once called yourself a Socialist, before you took up with flag-wagging and got in with the Birmingham set. I am not suggesting that you are a Socialist now; but I do doubt whether you are fundamentally anti-Socialist, or indeed 'pro' or 'anti' anything. I have a fancy you would be just as happy if you were a Commissar instead of a Secretary of State—provided the job gave you scope enough for your energies. Happier, very likely; for I don't think you can be feeling very happy where you are.

Why are you doing nothing about India—except

put the leaders of Indian opinion into gaol? Is Churchill the difficulty? His record in Indian affairs is about as bad as can be; and he is not merely your leader, but your old partner in the wilderness under the Chamberlain regime. Is it Churchill who is vetoing any offer to the Indian people which their leaders can possibly accept? If so, I am sorry for you; for when things go badly wrong, as they will, you stand to get most of the blame.

If Churchill is the obstacle, what is to be done? His opposition cannot be taken as decisive. He, I suppose, is thinking mainly about military strategy, and hardly at all about India—with the consequence that his attitude is governed by prejudice, and not by realistic thought about the present emergency. He, and the rest of the War Cabinet, have to be made to think about India, and to think straight. You have to make them do that.

The problem, as I see it, is this. To go on governing India by force is both inconsistent with Great Britain's professions about this war being fought for democracy, and beyond Great Britain's power. I do not suggest that armed insurrection in India is imminent; for, except for the small native army, British India is one of the most disarmed countries in the world. It has been a part of British policy to keep it so, and to handpick the Indian army so as to reduce to a minimum the risk of another 'Sepoy revolt.' Such other arms as there are in India are to be found much more in the native States than in British India proper; and the rulers of these States are for the most part supporters of British imperialism as a bulwark against Indian democracy. Armed revolt is therefore hardly to be expected, yet awhile, on any significant scale.

It would come only if we were so weakened by war elsewhere as to have to withdraw our garrisons and leave the native soldiers to choose between joining the people and perishing in defence of a cause in which they could have no faith.

But, short of armed revolt, an immense spread of civil disobedience is likely, unless we change our policy; and mass civil disobedience can hardly occur without 'incidents,' which will embitter opinion, and make authoritative government much more difficult. India will slip from under British control, until the day comes when, perhaps aided by 'another Power,' revolt does become possible, and the peoples of India rise and drive their rulers into the sea—unless those rulers have been wise in time.

I do not suggest that the problem is easy. India is not a homogeneous nation, that can easily pass under unified self-government. Nor is it at all clear what form of self-government is most suited to the needs of the Indian people. Englishmen have a natural tendency to think of self-government in parliamentary terms; but it does not at all follow that this is the form best fitted for India. Perhaps the Soviet form, with its much greater elasticity, might better meet the case.

Then there is the conflict between Hindu and Mahometan elements to be taken into account—with the certainty that, as long as we make disagreement between the Indian Congress and the Moslem League an excuse for doing nothing, the disagreement will continue, and the blame be rightly put on us. There is the deeper conflict between Indian landlords and mill-owners on the one hand, and the main body of the impoverished Indian people on the other—with the

wealthier classes poised between their desire to have the exploitation of peasants and workers solely in their own hands, and their fear that the removal of British imperialism might provide the occasion for doing away with economic exploitation as well. There are all sorts of cross-currents, among which it is easy enough to discover excuses for inaction. But inaction is fatal, because it means turning India into an enemy, when we badly need friends.

What is most keenly resented throughout India is that the country has been brought into the war without any consent of its own. It has been forced into the war as a dependency of the British Empire, and has not been given the chance to come in, like Canada or Australia, of its own will. It has not been given the chance of staying neutral, like Eire: it has simply been shoved into Britain's war. This is, of course, fully in accordance with imperialist tradition; and it was done in 1914 without provoking anything like the same resentment. But much has happened since 1914: India has been promised, but not given, Dominion status, and Indian Nationalism has developed a long way further. It is no longer possible to order the Indians about, and expect them not to show resentment.

What, then, ought you to do? It is a lamentable fact that, if you try to do the right thing, you can look for very little positive support in Great Britain. The British public, except its small but vocal imperialist section, is not thinking about India. Most Trade Unionists, like most other people, don't give a damn for India. Hardly anybody gives a damn for India, except the imperialists and a small body of intellectuals—whom Ernest Bevin would probably call 'Bloomsburyites,' and so rule out of court. The British people

doesn't want to think about India: it has enough on its plate without. Even the 'left' has never fought India's battles with conviction: the Manchester men have regarded India simply as a market for cotton goods; and not one man in a thousand in Great Britain really believes that men with brown skins have the same rights as white men. So, can we be surprised when Indians, even when it has been explained to them that they would be much worse off under the Nazis, or under Japan (as they would), still feel only resentment at being dragged, by the scruffs of their necks, into Great Britain's war?

You can do nothing about all this, unless you can talk the War Cabinet round to acting a long way in advance of British opinion. Talk them round to what? To offering the Indians, not Dominion status at some uncertain, future date—when maybe there won't be any British Empire for them to be a Dominion of—but something tangible, here and now. So what?

Suppose you were to instruct the Viceroy to convoke at once an Indian National Assembly, chosen on the widest franchise available. Suppose you were to go to India, meet that Assembly, and tell it to get ahead with the job of drafting a new constitution for British India, to be brought into operation at once—with freedom to put into it anything the delegates pleased, including complete independence. Suppose you were to lay down as your sole condition the retention, for the duration of the war, of certain naval stations needed for keeping the sea-routes open. Suppose you were to hand over the Indian army and the Indian police to the Assembly's control, and were to leave the Assembly to settle whether British soldiers and British Civil Servants should be withdrawn from all India,

You can't—you, or Churchill, or whoever is responsible for the present deadlock in India—have it both ways. You can't appeal to the spirit of democracy in England and America, and expect it to stay asleep in Asia—especially with the Soviet Union only a step from India over the mountains. You can't go on ruling India as your predecessors ruled it in the nineteenth century. If you mean to try ruling India by the sword, you will have to sharpen your sword up to twentieth-century, Nazi standards. You will have to shut up all the Indian leaders in concentration camps; and shoot at sight. But you can't do it, my dear Amery; and, what is more, you know you can't.

There is no alternative, except the offer of democratic friendship. Offer India freedom, tangible freedom, to be enjoyed now. Make Churchill let you do that; and you will go down to history as a great man. Carry on as you are doing and, if you hold your office long enough and are not moved on to some other job before nemesis overtakes you, the history books will record you as the last Secretary of State for India—the man who lost the Indian Empire when he might have made India Great Britain's friend.

Yours sincerely,

POPULUS.

IX

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE HERBERT MORRISON

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HOME
AFFAIRS, AND MINISTER OF
HOME SECURITY

MY DEAR MORRISON,

I was heartily glad when you went to your present post as successor to that cold-blooded bureaucrat, John Anderson; for, in common with most Londoners, I admire your capacity as an administrator; and in both your new capacities, as Home Secretary and as Minister of Home Security, you will have ample opportunity for exercising both your administrative skill and the qualities of humanity and real belief in democracy which I believe you to possess. I feel that, on the whole, you deserve congratulation for what you have done since you took office to handle the very serious human problems that have arisen out of intensive air bombardment; for, though there is very much amiss in the methods of protection against air attack, I cannot feel that the blame rests on you. You inherited a legacy of stupidity at the centre and inertia or incompetence on the part of many local authorities; and there has not been time for you to do more than a little towards putting matters right. I am not one of those who bay at you as if, in the space of a few weeks, you could, if you would, provide deep

shelters for everyone; nor do I think that 'breaking the cement ring' would suffice to solve at once the problems of cement shortage. I want the best shelter that can be got, for the largest possible number of people, above all in the poorer districts; and I want the cement industry taken over and nationalised out of hand. I want the building of deep shelters put high up in the list of priorities; and I want drastic action taken to improve fire-fighting services and to increase the security of water supply in every urban area. But I see no reason to suppose that you are not doing your level best about all these things; and the last thing I want to do about them is to sling mud at you because of your predecessor's sins.

If I have a quarrel with you, it is rather in your other capacity, as Home Secretary, and in connection with the problem of our treatment of alien refugees. I very much doubt whether, under present conditions, the two offices which you hold ought to be combined. You have enough on your hands in dealing with air bombardment and the other matters handled by the Regional Commissioners who are under your authority. It would be better if a separate Minister were in charge of the Home Office; and the person I should most like to see there would be Eleanor Rathbone.

But, as you are Home Secretary, as well as Minister of Home Security, you are the person whom I have to address. I am fully aware that the position about alien internees has improved since you took Anderson's place. I am aware that a substantial number of distinguished refugees, who ought never to have been interned, have been set free. I am aware that when you took office you found the records at the Home Office in so fearful a mess that you had to bring in a competent administrator to put things in order.

I am aware, too, that in dealing with aliens you are not wholly a free agent. There is a curious body called the 'Swinton Committee,' so 'hush-hush' that the Prime Minister loses his temper if it is as much as mentioned. There are various other 'hush-hush' organs of military intelligence—so-called—about which also no questions may be asked. These bodies no doubt limit your freedom to deal with the problem as you would handle it if they were less influential in high quarters—though to what extent no outsider can be in a position to say.

As I have no means of shooting at the 'Swinton Committee' or the 'Red Tabs' except through you, or of knowing where their responsibility ends and yours begins, you must pardon me if I seem to be laying on your department blame that is really theirs. It seems to me simply monstrous that the release of alien refugees who fled to this country from Nazi persecution has not been nearly one-half accomplished even now. It fills me with shame that many men whom I know to be good democrats and to have suffered at the hands of the Nazis for their good work remain shut up in British concentration camps instead of being allowed to help in the anti-Nazi struggle.

Among the 'enemy aliens' in this country there are, of course, many who are not refugees. Many have been resident here for business reasons, and some of these have lived among us for a very long time. Some of them have children who are British subjects, fighting in the British Army or engaged in important war work. There are also a considerable number of refugees who are not 'political,' but have fled as Jews from countries in which they are denied the ordinary rights of men to a country still, thank heaven, fairly free

from the spreading poison of racial fanaticism. Thirdly, there are the 'politicals,' men who stand for the reconstruction of the European order on a basis of democratic freedom.

Now among all these groups—even among the Jews—there are bound to be lurking some spies and Nazi agents; and it is the business of our intelligence and police services to hunt them down. But spies, one knows, are not too easy to detect; and it is not difficult to follow the simple logic which concluded, at a time when invasion seemed imminent, that the safest policy was to "intern the lot." But to keep up, month after month, this policy of mass-internment is to forget that the aliens question has two sides. An 'enemy alien' is not either an 'enemy agent' or just a harmless person: he is also potentially a most important helper in the war effort. Among the internees are not only a number of excellent scholars, eager to be back at their books, but also a considerable number of the best potential leaders of anti-Fascist revolt in Europe—men who hate Nazism and Fascism with a devouring hatred as the murderer and oppressor of their friends and comrades, and want passionately to be in the front line in the struggle against it.

I know you have released some of these men, and are planning to release more. But you and the tribunals which act for you are infernally slow about the business. Nor am I satisfied that your tribunals are going about the matter in the right way. I find an impression, too widespread to be ignored, that, so far from being a recommendation, it is still an obstacle in the way of release to have been active anywhere on the left wing of the Socialist movement, and that even orthodox Social Democrats are apt to be looked at askance if

they are unlucky enough to find themselves before the wrong tribunals. I feel pretty convinced that the Swintons and the 'Red Tabs' have a down on Socialists of all sorts, and would much sooner release a non-Jewish business man about whose politics nothing is known than a stout friend of democracy with a proven record of anti-Fascist activity. This, you may answer, is not your fault, even if it is true. But it is your business as Minister to stand up to these reactionary influences, and to insist that all proven friends of democracy be not merely released but given the chance, according to their capacities, of helping the cause of European revolution.

After all, the Nazi spies and agents are much more likely to be found among German business men who profess no politics than among proven political refugees. I know there is a category of persons who can apply for release on the ground of past eminent service in anti-Nazi movements. But this applies to leaders whose speeches or writings can be produced; I want it to apply to rank-and-file party workers as well, wherever they can find reputable sponsors to speak for them.

Perhaps you are attending to all this; but I do wish you would speed matters up. I do not like the feeling of my anti-Nazi friends eating their hearts out in concentration camps and wondering if this is British democracy.

To many people the whole question of the aliens may seem a small matter beside that of air-raids and the havoc they cause. So let us come back to your other office. I do not want to trouble you with those parts of the problem that plenty of other people are writing about every day—not because they are unimportant, far from it, but because I have nothing fresh to say.

I shall stick to a secondary point or two, that are not, I think, getting enough attention.

When people are bombed, not merely out of their homes, but out of their work as well, what do you expect them to do? Get another job, if they are manual workers suitable for factory employment. But supposing they are small traders, or professional men, who have lost their stock-in-trade, what then? It is not sound economy to leave such people to live on their capital, if they have any, in the hope of receiving at any rate partial compensation at some unknown date in the future—when, moreover, the money they get may have lost most of its value. It is not sound economy to maintain them for long periods by grants from the U.A.B. or Public Assistance Committee. And, in many cases, it is neither sound economy nor humanly possible to expect them to take jobs in a factory or in the A.F.S. Whenever possible, such people ought to be given quickly the means of starting again—by adequate loans of capital, free of interest, until they receive their compensation, and by the utmost possible help in getting work executed, when they want to start again in a damaged building, or in securing the necessary stock-in-trade when they propose to set up elsewhere.

The new War Damage Bill sets out to deal with some of these problems. But it does not seem to cover nearly all of them, or to meet the type of case I have chiefly in mind. It is bad for morale to keep these victims of air attack hanging about with nothing to do. Similarly, where men have been sent away from defence areas, and so deprived of their ordinary means of earning a living, they ought to be restarted as promptly as possible elsewhere. If you fail to give

people who suffer in this way a reasonable chance, you give them a grievance; and those who set out to fight for democracy by democratic means can ill afford to let grievances grow among the people.

In this connection, I have a simple suggestion to make. Why not take over the whole of the Building Societies and turn them, with their vast capital resources, into a great public corporation acting directly under your department as an agency for handling all claims for advances, not only for building, but also for the purchase of stock-in-trade, or professional implements, or anything else a victim of air-bombardment or eviction from a defence area may need to replace? The taking over of the Building Societies would further enable you to get a satisfactory national scheme covering all the financial difficulties which arise over instalment payments for destroyed or damaged or compulsorily evacuated dwellings, and to apply uniform principles in deciding where labour and materials should be released for re-building or repair. You would have in this, I suppose, to work in with Lord Reith's new Works and Buildings Department; and possibly the suggestion should be made to him rather than to you. But I have not been able to discover (nor can I find anyone who has) what Lord Reith is doing, or is supposed to do.

I will detain you no longer, except to wish you luck; for you have much to do, and your success in doing it is of vital importance in sustaining the spirit of the people. So, my dear Morrison, I hope you will take your own advice, and 'Go to it.'

Yours sincerely,

POPULUS.

X

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE SIR KINGSLEY WOOD

CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER

LITTLE MAN,

You are supposed to be responsible for finding the money wherewith to pay for the economic effort of war. After a fashion, you are actually finding it; for the war is going on, and the soldiers, sailors and airmen, the civil servants, the contractors and the workers engaged on war contracts are all getting paid. So why worry? Why worry—especially now that President Roosevelt has politely declared his intention of continuing to supply Great Britain with munitions of war, even if the British Government is not in a position to pay for them, or even to promise payment in the future?

However much you spend on the war, as long as you can cover those foreign payments which do have to be met, you will always be able to finance the war. When it comes to the point, Governments always can. When they have raised as much as they feel like raising by taxes, they can resort to borrowing; and if their power to borrow were to run out because they could find no-one willing to lend, they could always as a last resort print the money they wanted, and compel the people to accept it because there would be no better money to be had. There is no

known limit to the amount of money a Government can spend, because there is no limit to the amount of paper money that can be printed, or the amount of credit that can be created, at a Government's behest.

Of course, when Governments take to printing money or creating credit, or get the banks to do these things for them by paying them for the service or by direct compulsion, certain consequences follow. Money borrowed is one thing when it comes out of real savings, so that it is money transferred from spending for one purpose to spending for another; it is something quite different when the lender creates it out of nothing, for the purpose of the loan. For in the latter case it represents an addition to the total amount of spending power in the country; and, unless the quantity of things available for purchase rises correspondingly, some things are bound to cost more than they did before. Whenever the Government creates spending power for itself, without directly taking away an equivalent spending power from someone else, it does take away spending power from other people indirectly, by raising prices, unless the total material production increases as a result of its use of the money by enough to offset the increase in the supply of means of payment.

This is very elementary economics, and a good deal oversimplified for exactness, but it does stand for a fundamental truth. Beyond a point which is soon reached, the financing of war either by State creation of credit or currency or by State borrowing from the banks is inflationary, in the sense that it raises prices and thus reduces the real incomes of the people.

You, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, are financing

this war by inflation. The sums which you are raising by taxation, even at the present increased levels, *plus* the sums which you are inducing the public to lend you out of their savings, fall an enormous way short of meeting the costs of the war. The rest of the money you need you are getting by way of loans from the bankers—both from the Bank of England and from the joint stock banks; and the higher the total of war expenditure rises, the larger proportion are you being driven to raise in this inflationary way.

What else are you to do? Suppose you were to confiscate the entire income of everybody in excess of, say, £1,000 a year, you would not have come within sight of balancing your budget without inflationary borrowing. Suppose you were to take all income in excess of £500 a year, you would not have solved your problem even then. You would not have solved it, even on the present scale of public expenditure. But you and I know that during the coming year the State's orders are going to consume a very much larger part of the nation's total output than they did in 1940.

What are you to do? Various counsellors have been giving you their ideas. Maynard Keynes, until you shut him up somewhere in a padded room in the Treasury, was advising you to adopt the expedient of a forced graduated levy on all incomes except the smallest, tempered by a scheme of family allowances to prevent large households from going unduly short, and by an odd scheme for repaying a part of the levy after the war, as 'deferred pay' for war service. This at scheme, the time when it was put forward, seemed to most people very drastic. But even if your predecessor in office had adopted it, the problem of

financing the war without inflation would not have been solved, though public expenditure was then running at a much lower level than it is to-day.

A more drastic plan has been put forward in certain quarters for limiting every person in the community to a fixed ration of spendable income, and either taking the rest from them outright, or compelling them to save it and lend it to the State. This method, if the spendable income were put low enough, clearly could be made to yield the result of paying for the war without inflationary borrowing. But, in a country in which standards of living between classes differ widely, fixed obligations differ widely too; and equal rationing of incomes for all would be impossible without a tremendous series of social upsets.

The core of the problem is, of course, to check expenditure on things that are scarce, in such a way as to cause as little hardship as possible. There is a sense in which nearly everything is scarce; for nearly everything costs labour to make, and labour itself is scarce, and getting scarcer. But some things are, and should be, a good deal scarcer than others—for example, things that use up plant, materials and skilled labour that could be used for making munitions, imports (except sheer necessities) which use up scarce transport and scarce supplies of foreign exchange, and such luxury goods as are made with an unnecessary expenditure of materials and labour.

Now, apart from the comparatively narrow range of goods which are actually rationed to the individual consumers, the methods which you are using to limit consumption at present are twofold. You are making many classes of goods artificially dear by means of the Purchase Tax, in the hope of deterring people

from buying them; and you are restricting the actual production of most commodities not needed by the Government for war purposes by limiting supplies of materials, leaving the manufacturers to parcel out the restricted supplies among wholesalers, who will in turn 'ration' the retailers, who will then be expected to 'ration' their customers.

The defects of these methods are obvious. The Purchase Tax bears much more hardly on poor people than on rich, who may be deterred by it hardly at all, and may live on their capital sooner than go without. The 'global' limitation of supplies also hits the poor, both because traders are apt to give the preference to their richer customers and because rich people have, as a rule, much more opportunity than poor people to go round from shop to shop, picking up what they can get. Perhaps you regard these effects as desirable; for as a Conservative Chancellor you may be expected to have a tenderness for the rich. I regard them as thoroughly bad.

Instead of them, I should like to see a great extension of rationing, both to further foodstuffs and to such things as clothes. For clothes, and for some other things, it would probably be right to fix the ration in terms of the sum to be spent, rather than the actual goods to be bought; and the same method might be applied to some foodstuffs—for example, by making fish and cheese alternatives to meat, purchaseable with interchangeable coupons. Wider rationing would undoubtedly be much fairer to the poor than the existing methods; and I can see no reason except this why you and your colleagues have not applied it.

I agree, however, that rationing of goods cannot be extended so far as to limit total consumption;

for there are many things which it is impracticable to ration directly. For these I should favour the method of putting a limit to total expenditure by each individual on 'shop' goods, leaving out such forms of expenditure as rent, wages for personal service, cinema tickets, travel, and the like. If necessary, in the interests of man-power, the keeping of servants could be limited directly; but this might not be necessary. For the others, 'global' limitation of supply is probably as good a method as it is practicable at present to devise.

The level of permitted expenditure in general would of course have to be related to the supplies of goods available in terms of the national plan of production—that is, to the quantities of man-power, machines and materials reserved for making goods for civil consumption. There would have to be an all-round control of prices, extending to many articles whose prices are at present practically uncontrolled; and there would have to be severe penalties for buying, as well as for selling, more than the permitted supplies.

If this were done, on a sufficiently drastic scale, the war could be financed without inflation. You could either borrow, compulsorily if necessary, the incomes which people were not allowed to spend; or, better, you could raise taxation much higher than you can raise it now. But there is a further point. If consumption were effectively limited, and if, further, the prices of all necessary goods were rigidly controlled, it would not matter much if you did inflate; for the money would merely pile up unusable in people's hands, or be used in ways that would neither hinder the war effort nor inflict hardship on the poor.

Whereas, if you go on as you are going now, creating additional money without effectively rationing the individual consumers except over a very narrow range, and at the same time restricting (as you must) the total supplies of consumers' goods, most unpleasant consequences are bound to occur. The prices of all uncontrolled goods will rise faster and faster; persons of means and leisure will clear the shops of unrationed goods at the expense of the poor and overworked; the rich will live on their capital in large numbers sooner than restrict their consumption—and where total supplies are limited they can do this only at the expense of the poor—and there will come from the thwarted consumers who think they are not getting their fair share of what is going a demand, too strong to be resisted, that increased supplies shall be made available. But this last can be done only by taking transport, materials, machines and man-power away from making war goods—that is, by reducing the nation's war effort below what it ought to be.

You, little man, must know all this as well as I know it. But I can see your dilemma. You believe in the class system; and you realise that, if once the wealthier classes are compelled to cut down the expenditure on most things to the same level as the poorer, it will not be easy to go back to the old inequalities when the war ends. You think that the rich man in his castle and the poor man at his gate ought to be enabled, or made, to preserve their distance even in wartime, lest the basis of the social order be subverted. And you carry this belief to the point of allowing the richer classes to maintain a level of expenditure which is bound to hamper the war effort.

I wonder how fully conscious your Labour colleagues in the War Cabinet are of this aspect of your financial policy. I wonder how long they will continue to put up with it when the pressure of scarcity becomes really acute, as it soon will. And I wonder, too, how long they will put up with your policy of paying the bankers to lend you money which they do not possess, and with your smirking complacency as the floating debt mounts up, and you do nothing either to check its increase or to render it harmless by effective limitation on private expenditure. In fact, I wonder how long they, and the country, will continue to put up with you.

Yours sincerely,
POPULUS.

XI

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE SIR ARCHIBALD SINCLAIR

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR AIR, AND
LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY

DEAR SINCLAIR,

I am writing to you, not about the work of your department, but because in the Government you represent what is left of the Liberal Party.

There is not much left of it; and what there is does not count as a constructive force. Your party does not stand for any positive policy: it merely provides a way of escape. Men are Liberals nowadays, when not by mere tradition, because they are neither Tories nor Labour men, neither Communists nor Fascists, and yet cannot quite bring themselves to let politics alone. Your party professes, indeed, to stand for certain high ideals—liberty of speech and association, of trade and enterprise, and democracy as a political principle. Up to a point, it does stand for these things: what it fails to stand for is any practicable method of securing them in the world of to-day.

For freedom and the spirit of democracy are not things that can be made good in a void. They arise and flourish, or fail to arise and flourish, upon certain economic and social foundations; and the ways of fighting for them must be appropriate to these foundations. There was a time when Liberalism, standing

for freedom of capitalist development against aristocratic privilege, rested securely on the foundations of an expanding and progressive economic order, with the confident and powerful backing of capitalists, great and small, and of a large section of the working class as well. But that day is long past. Capitalism, in its later phases, has ceased to stand for economic progress, and is ever busier creating restrictive monopolies in order to hold up profits by inducing artificial scarcity. Whereas, in the great days of Liberalism, the rising capitalist asked of the State only that it should protect his property and then let him be, nowadays the capitalist is always running to the State for protection of his monopoly rights, both against rival capitalist groups abroad and against competition at home.

Under these new conditions, Liberalism is no longer the creed of capitalism. One after another, the great capitalists make their peace with the privileged aristocrats who used to be their enemies, and go over to the Tory Party. To the Liberal Party is left only a residue of petty capitalists, fighting losing battles against monopoly, and a considerable body of waverers, hankerers after the old forms of freedom which technical development is sweeping ruthlessly away, and wilful myopics who refuse to look straight at reality.

I want to put you and your party this plain question. On what basis do you propose to rebuild Great Britain when this war is over? Will you try to put capitalism back, or do you recognise that there is henceforward only one kind of capitalism possible, and that kind State capitalism, whose other name is Fascism? Even before this war, Great Britain was ruled, despite the

elements of democracy in its political constitution, mainly by a ring of great capitalist trusts—bankers, steel magnates, colliery owners, shipbuilders and ship-owners, chemical manufacturers, armament makers and engineers. These great trusts looked to the State for protection, and got it. They drove rivals out of business, dismantled 'redundant' factories, consolidated their privileged monopolies—all with the approval of the State. To-day, to all intents and purposes these great trusts *are* the State, in its economic aspect—the State 'controls' them, but they are the 'Controls.' The amalgamation of the State with big business has gone so far that the two can never be prised apart. There is no way back to 'liberal' capitalism: the only real choice is between State capitalism, *alias* Fascism, and Socialism.

For the State cannot control the trusts in the service of the people. The trusts are inherently restrictive: they exist to promote scarcity. The only way of preventing them from keeping the people poor is to destroy them; and the only way of destroying them is for the State to take over their property, and therewith their power. That is Socialism—public ownership of the means of production, under the democratic control of the people.

The plain reason why you cannot have 'liberal' capitalism back is that the modern scale of production is too vast for it: competition and profit can no longer live together: the drive towards monopoly is much too strong to be resisted. And, where monopoly rules industry, the State must bolster up monopoly, because the monopolist, if he were allowed to fall, would spread ruin everywhere around him. The State dare not allow a great bank or a great trust to fail; and therefore the

State must do the bank's and the trust's bidding, as long as it allows them to exist.

When this war is over, if not sooner, you, like all the rest of us, will have to choose between Fascism and Socialism—between state-capitalist monopoly and democratically controlled public enterprise—as the basis for the new social order. Or rather, there is one other possibility, Communism, which is Socialism established by bloody class-war, and carrying upon it for a long time afterwards the scars of battle. If Socialism has to come in that way, the chances of preserving the truly valuable things for which your party professes to stand—personal freedom, mutual toleration, respect for individual preferences—will be poor indeed for our generation or for the next. That sort of Socialism will be as authoritarian as Fascism, even though its authority is applied to better purpose. If we can get Socialism without violence, we can hope to carry over into the new order the civilised values which we had gone some way towards establishing under the old order, and, by adapting them to their new environment, to develop them much further, and make them the common possession of all citizens.

Will you not join with us Socialists in that crusade, instead of wasting your time on vain attempts to re-liberalise capitalism, which has firmly turned its back on liberty? One reason which holds many of your party back from joining with us is that to do so would mean joining the Labour Party, in which they feel no confidence. They regard it as the party of the Trade Unions, who are only a part of the people; and they see in Trade Unionism a vested interest not unlike the vested interests of monopoly capitalism. Trade Unionism, they feel, is too narrow a foundation for building a new

social order; and so they hold back, and do not help to build anything at all.

But for the moment I am not asking you or your party to join the Labour Party as it is. In the coming struggle between Fascism and Socialism, no party is going to remain as it has been. The necessities of the conflict will enforce new party alignments. It is Socialism, not the Labour Party, for which I am trying to persuade you to stand.

What is wrong with the Labour Party is not its programme. It does possess, on paper, a policy admirably designed to replace capitalist monopoly by collective planning for plenty and at the same time to enlarge men's liberties by the assurance of social security and economic independence. Its proffered creed—Social Democracy—is essentially libertarian as well as collectivist; it sets out to control the massed forces of production in order to give men freedom to seek the good life in their several personal ways. But, I agree with you, my party has hitherto lacked the driving force needed to carry its programme into effect. Twice, in office, it has dithered, and gone down to deserved defeat. I am not surprised when Liberals who have come to realise the essential soundness of its programme still hesitate to join it, and prefer the impotent isolation of Liberalism to the impotence of a mass-movement that cannot make up its mind to move.

What is wrong with the Labour Party is not its programme, but its lack of faith in its programme. And this applies, not merely to the leaders, but to the rank and file. The main body of the British working class has not, even now, ceased to believe that it is possible to go on squeezing more and more concessions out of capitalism, without killing the goose that lays the eggs.

It has not realised that capitalism is going barren, that it can lay, in its decline, barely enough eggs to go round, and that there is no chance of it being able to lay even so many by the time this war is at an end. British capitalism has spent the past twenty years in fouling its own nest. Its only significant achievements in all that time have been in strengthening monopoly by the destruction of 'redundant capacity.' It has torn down chemical works, steelworks, cotton mills, in order to keep itself alive. It has razed shipyards to the ground, scrapped vessels, closed down coal mines and cement works, and put hosts of small and middle-sized producers out of business. It has become finance-ridden, under the thumb of the huge, trustified banks. Hardly anywhere in it is there a spark of vigorous, creative life.

Yet out of this shrinking corruption most of my party's supporters, and many of yours too, still hope to extract concessions which will yield a rising standard of life. The hope is futile; but it is not easily given up, because it is a comfortable hope, and calls for little effort.

If you realise the futility of this hope as well as I, why cannot we, and others who share our view, whether we are inside the Labour Party or not, get together on the basis of a common will to build Socialism? Can't you join with the Labour men in the Government—join in persuading them, if need be—that their job is not merely to get the Means Test modified, or increased allowances for soldiers' dependants, old age pensioners, workmen on compensation payments, and so on (very important as all these things are) but also, in organising this country for war, to lay firm foundations for its Socialist organisation when peace returns? You can't

help being alive to the inefficiency of our present war machine, on its economic side. You must see the folly of letting the trusts control in the name of the State, of making separate contracts for supplies with all the separate privately owned firms, and of first letting people make excessive profits and then trying to take them away by taxation. You must know how ridiculous it is for the State to pile up debts against itself by borrowing from the bankers, instead of taking the banks over once and for all. Surely, by this time you must be convinced of the need for something very like Socialism as a war measure, and of the impossibility of winning the war without it. If you do see these things, make your party see them too, and start fighting for them here and now as means, both of making victory certain and of finding new foundations for the old Liberal values of freedom and individuality, which will perish, whether we win or lose the war, if we allow the State capitalism of the monopolists to become our master.

Yours sincerely,
POPULUS.

XII

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE HUGH DALTON

MINISTER OF ECONOMIC WARFARE

MY DEAR DALTON,

I wish you were not wasting your abilities just now in a department in which the fortune of war has left you with nothing of any great significance to do. I wish you were either in a more important office—say, as Minister of Economic Planning, or, better still, outside the Government, leading the ‘shadow’ opposition in Parliament and the Labour Party in the country. For the Labour Party needs leading, both in the House of Commons and outside; and at present it is simply not being led. Lees Smith, in Parliament, does no more than echo decorously the Government’s pronouncements and assert again and again that the party is behind the Government in the prosecution of the war. Transport House appears to have gone fast asleep; and the local Labour Parties, with many of their best workers away or fully occupied with emergency war services, are finding great difficulty in carrying on effective Socialist propaganda and sometimes even in holding their organisations together.

The Labour Party needs leading; but the task of leadership under war conditions is bound to be difficult. It is difficult simultaneously to support a

Government and to criticise it—most difficult of all, when one's own party leaders hold important offices in it, so that in criticising it you cannot help seeming to criticise them as well. It is difficult to press a proposal, when one of your own leaders may be put up to speak against it on the Government's behalf. It is difficult to speak out boldly about matters which the Government is trying to avoid mentioning, because it does not agree about them itself—without seeming to be disloyal to your own leaders, who are in the Government, and therewith disloyal to the war effort as well.

Yet somebody must speak out, if we are either to win the war or to lay the foundations for a Socialist reconstruction at its end. It is unthinkable that Great Britain can either win the war or rebuild itself afterwards under a Government which has no common mind about the basic problems of economic organisation. This Government will have to go either Socialist, or Fascist, in order to achieve either unity or a possible basis for post-war reconstruction. If it goes Fascist, or shows signs of moving towards Fascism, the Labour Party will have to be ready to fight it with all its strength. If it goes Socialist—but it cannot go Socialist without a powerful agitation in the country to impel it towards Socialism. You and I, who believe that Socialism is the necessary method both of winning the war and of laying the foundations of the new order, know very well that we can't have Socialism without Socialists, and that the worst way of building Socialism is to let the Socialist movement in the country die.

Suppose you were out of the Government, and were made acting leader of the Labour Party in Parliament, and also returned to your position as

chairman of the Policy Committee at Transport House, what would you do? In your parliamentary doings, I hope you would follow Shinwell's example rather than Lees Smith's; for Shinwell, more than anyone else, has succeeded in keeping the Socialist issue to the fore, and has not hesitated to criticise Labour members of the Government, as well as others, when they have deserved criticism. You, if you took this line, might be able to wake up the Labour back-benchers, who appear for the most part to regard it as their only duty to support the Government, whether it is doing right or wrong. You would be able to expose the inadequacy of our war effort, the extent to which it is being thwarted by tenderness for the rights of capitalism, the foggiess of our war aims, the criminal lunacy of the Government's conduct in India, and our conspicuous failure to do anything to help the prospects of Socialist revolution in Europe. In doing this you would not only reanimate the Labour back-benchers, but also wake up popular opinion, which, given nothing to feed on by those who should be leading it, is the more easily seduced by defeatist propaganda camouflaged in various ways.

Of course, if you did these things you would be accused of disrupting the national unity, and of disloyalty to your colleagues in the Government. The Tory head office would be greatly annoyed, and would make a dead set at you by every means in its power. Your name would be mud—with some people. But you would soon become the recognised leader of a great body of opinion in the country—and not only Labour Party opinion, either—and you would immensely strengthen the hands of your Labour friends inside the Government in standing out for

a more effective organisation of the war effort and in making sensible preparations for the tasks of peace.

It is one among the many contradictions of the present situation that we are fighting this war for democracy and Socialism under a Parliament which hates them both—an utterly unrepresentative House of Commons, elected by a trick in 1935 on a programme of collective security and democratic collaboration which it proceeded promptly to disavow. I find it impossible to believe that such a Parliament can either carry this country through to victory or settle the structure of post-war Britain on any tolerable basis. Somehow, before the war ends, this Parliament of Chamberlainite reaction will have to be replaced by one which better represents the real opinion of the people.

But how? A General Election at present would do no good, because it would be impossible to fight it on any real issue. Nor would a resumption of by-elections do any good, for the same reason. The necessary pre-condition of any useful appeal to the people is a clear definition of issues on which the electors can be invited to decide. There is only one issue on which it is worth testing the opinion of the country—the issue of State capitalism *versus* Socialism as the basis of war organisation for victory and of post-war reconstruction of the social system. But on this issue no appeal can be made until certain conditions have been met. The first of these is that the Labour Party shall have put the case for War Socialism plainly and vigorously both in Parliament and in the country, by means of a national campaign; and the second is that Parliament shall have rejected War Socialism,

and revealed itself to the people as ready to risk losing the war sooner than jeopardise the privileges and monopolies of the capitalist class.

The first step, therefore, towards getting rid of the present reactionary Parliament is to put the case for Socialism, as a war measure, clearly and insistently before the Government and the people. How far the Government itself would be prepared to go, under such pressure, I do not pretend to know; but certainly it could not go all the way that it needs to go without resignations, or without coming up against the envenomed opposition of the Tory majority in the House of Commons. Then would come the time for an appeal to the country, with the Government, *minus* the seceders, standing for a policy of Socialism as a necessity of war, and the advocates of the vested interests revealed plainly as the enemies of democracy and of full national mobilisation for victory.

It can, of course, be maintained that, if the Government were to declare for Socialism, or a large instalment of it, as necessary for winning the war, the Tory majority in Parliament would give way, and would not dare to press its objections—provided that the Government stood firm. This might indeed happen when the first Socialist measure was brought forward, or the second, or the third; but it is not easy to imagine that the Tory business M.P.s would let everything go without making a stand, or that they would not, at the least, so sabotage and obstruct the Government's measures as to make it indispensable to be rid of them. Accordingly, even if the present Parliament did seem at first to be swallowing War Socialism, I feel sure it would come to the same thing in the long

run, and a General Election would be the only way out.

Some people, I know, deny that it is possible to hold a General Election under war conditions. If I thought that, I should be driven to advocate Cromwellian methods; for, I repeat, the idea of leaving the present Parliament in power till after the war is over is more than I can stomach. But I do not think it. A General Election is perfectly possible, as soon as there is a clear issue to fight it on. It need not, and should not, be a General Election of the normal sort; for that would mean fighting it on a hopelessly obsolete register. The simple course would be to keep the existing constituencies, but to allow any elector to vote, on production of his National Registration Card, which would then be stamped, in any constituency he might choose—on a simple basis of one citizen, one vote.¹ Serving soldiers, sailors and airmen could either be allowed to vote by post, in any constituency they pleased, or could be formed into special electoral units, returning their own members. There are doubtless alternative ways in which a wartime General Election could be organised; but here at any rate is one way—to give the lie to those who shelter behind the assertion that the thing cannot be done.

Whether or not you agree with me about this, I feel sure you will agree that, whatever the difficulties, the Labour Party in Parliament and in the country ought to be putting up a fight for Socialism here and now. Surely you and I, as Socialists, are at one in

¹ It would of course be necessary to provide penalties against voting while under age. But anyone who attempted to do this would have thereafter to carry the evidence of guilt stamped on his or her registration card. This should be a sufficient deterrent.

holding that, despite the presence of yourself and other Socialists in the Government, the mobilisation of our resources for war is being hampered at every turn by the attempt to wage economic warfare on a basis of private ownership. As long as the essential instruments of production are left in profit-seeking hands, it will remain impossible to apply them with full effectiveness. Each vested interest will continue to play its own game, with a view to consolidating its position for continued profit-making after the war. Each firm will jealously guard its private patents, its machinery, markets, and supplies of skilled labour and organising ability, for its own exclusive use. Each group of workers, facing the same owners and managers as before the war, will suspect every move that is made against established rules and customs as a manoeuvre to undermine Trade Union rights. Each contractor will play for his own hand: each 'Controller' drawn from the ranks of big business will be working for his own trust or combine as well as for the State. Instead of a spirit of service in a common cause, we shall continue to have a 'pull devil, pull baker' confusion with which even the most competent, energetic and disinterested Minister will struggle in vain.

You, if you were free of office, could help the country to get out of this muddle, and to set its feet firmly on the Socialist road. Lees Smith cannot do it: he is not the man. Middleton, at Transport House, will not do it: he is too busy looking for fresh organisations to put on his blacklist. No-one is doing it; and the consequence is that the Socialists in the country are left leaderless and sick at heart. Is this a war for democracy, or isn't it? If it is, what basis can

there be for democracy, in this era of mass power, short of Socialism? Finally, if democracy can only win by making Socialism its instrument, ought not you and I to be doing something about Socialism now?

Yours sincerely,
POPULUS.

•

